LANDMARKS

E·V·LUCAS

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LANDMARKS

OTHER WORKS BY E. V. LUCAS

Mr. Ingleside
Listener's Lure
Over Bemerton's
London Lavender
Loiterer's Harvest
One Day and Another
Fireside and Sunshine
Character and Comedy
Old Lamps for New
The Hambledon Men
The Open Road
The Friendly Town
Her Infinite Variety
Good Company
The Gentlest Art
The Second Post
The Life of Charles Lamb
A Swan and Her Friends
A Wanderer in Venice
A Wanderer in Florence
A Wanderer in London
A Wanderer in Holland
A Wanderer in Paris
The British School
Highways and Byways in Sussex
Anne's Terrible Good Nature
The Slowcoach

and

The Pocket Edition of the works of Charles Lamb: I. Miscellaneous Prose; II. Elia; III. Children's Books; IV. Poems and Plays; V. and VI. Letters.

LANDMARKS

BY

E. V. LUCAS

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1914

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCING

IF this story were told on the cinematograph as "The Life of Rudd Sergison," or "The Most Significant Passages in the Life of Rudd Sergison" (only, of course, the public would need a far more sensationally alluring title than these), it would begin, I suppose, earlier, and in the manner of a Chinese play show us the courtship of his honourable father and mother: tender passages in a sitting-room raked by a high wind, or scenes of that kind. My narrative ought perhaps to do the same; but instead I have chosen a later starting-point, and thereafter have endeavoured—passing Rudd's career in review—to put myself in the place of the gifted gentlemen who apply the severe selective machinery of the cinema and with such decision discard all but the relevant and constructive.

The task has not been easy; so far from it that I have often found myself wishing that instead of "Landmarks" I had called the book "Incidents" and thus spread a wider net. For it is curious how many things

happen to us, often at the time apparently momentous, and, generally, interesting enough, which do not count; curious how few real landmarks even a long life need contain; and even more curious how lasting can be the effect of what seem to be trivial occurrences and experiences: words even, lightly spoken by others, which fall on soil to that very instant prepared for them; casual wayside meetings; actions of total strangers; and so forth. Not until later can we distinguish between the influential and the unimportant. It is as though a few drops of water sank into the duck's back.

For example, with many a boy the acquisition of a first gun would be a landmark. But it was not so with Rudd. When his Uncle Hector gave him a rook-and-rabbit rifle on his sixteenth birthday he was excited enough; but the event was no landmark. The landmark came a few days later when, in the evening, as dusk was falling, he shot his first rabbit, and on running up in triumph found that he had merely broken its leg. After vainly trying to kill it by breaking its neck, he had to place the muzzle within a few inches of its suffering head, blow its brains out, and at the same moment relinquish for ever the pursuit of sport. That was the landmark.

Again, the marriage ceremony might be considered a landmark in any life; but it is a mere blur in many a mind compared with, on the hither side, the fact of acceptance, and, on the farther side, the moment (which sometimes arrives) when the discovery is made that the glamour has gone, that the lute has a rift in

it, or more serious, that the lady is Leah and not Rachel.

The birth of the first child, a daughter, say, might similarly be considered a landmark; yet it is possible for a daughter to grow into a woman and never disturb or arrest her father's even tenor until the moment when she declares her intention of marrying a youth who is hateful to him. On the other hand, the loan of a halfpenny newspaper in a railway compartment may change a career.

The cinema will always have over mere writers the advantage of presenting the visible moving scene; but, with all this heavy artillery, not yet, I notice, has it been able to dispense with the assistance of our poor words. We still have to help it out. This being so, it is hard that we cannot share in the benefits of the alliance; for what novels could be set before our readers if only we could now and then resort to the ingenious and vivid resources of the film!

But this is a digression—in a book which was to have none. Let me forthwith introduce my hero and his mother, characteristically if not dramatically employed.

It was a winter's afternoon—one of many. The lamplighter had finished his round, and it was the best time of all: after tea. Scene: a Victorian sitting-room, with a whatnot in the corner. Dramatis personæ: Mrs. Sergison (aged 36), Rudd Sergison, her only child (aged 7 that day).

The comfortable scent of crumpets, which Rudd

had been toasting and his mother buttering, still lingered.

"Now," said Rudd, seating himself on a hassock at his mother's knee as she opened a book. His small grave face shone with a double glow: with the fire-light and the anticipation of pleasure. A new book of stories was to be begun! A wonderful book. He had his mother's word for it.

"Are you quite settled?" she asked.

"Yes," said Rudd.

"Which shall it be?" she asked. "A funny one or a pretty one?"

"Are there both kinds?" Rudd asked.

"Oh yes," she said.

"It's *really* a good book?" he asked.

"Really," she said. "It was my favourite when I was a little girl, and I have been keeping it till you were seven, which was when it was given to me. Now which shall it be, a funny one or a pretty one?"

"Won't you choose for me?" said Rudd, "or," he added on a sudden and splendid inspiration, "couldn't we have one of each?"

"Two?" she asked, affecting to be alarmed by his greed.

"Yes, two; and then" (taking courage from her tone) "two more!"

His mother laughed in a shocked voice.

"I'll name three funny ones first," she said, "and then three pretty ones. These are funny ones: 'Big

Claus and Little Claus,' 'The Brave Tin Soldier,' 'The Tinder Box.' You're not too near the fire, are you?"

"No," said Rudd.

His mother continued: "These are pretty ones: 'The Bronze Boar,' 'The Fir Tree,' 'The Nightingale.' Now then?"

"Which would you say?" Rudd asked.

"No, I want you to choose," said Mrs. Sergison. "They're all perfect."

"Very well, then," said Rudd, thinking deeply. "First, we'll have 'The Brave Tinder Box,' and then——"

"That's two," said Mrs. Sergison. "You've mixed them up. It's 'The Brave Tin Soldier,' one, and 'The Tinder Box,' two."

"'The Tinder Box,'" said Rudd, "and then—then we'll have 'The Bronze Boar.'"

"Very well," said his mother. "You're quite sure you're not too near the fire?"

"Quite," said Rudd.

His mother began to read Hans Andersen's story of "The Tinder Box."

CHAPTER II

A PRESENT FOR A GOOD BOY

ONE of the less invulnerable dispensations of Providence is the early age at which we lose our grandfathers. It is as though the All-Knowing said: "I am so perfectly sure that you would never profit by the ripe experience which your grandfather has to offer you that you shall not even have the opportunity of hearing it." The loss is ours, perhaps, more than theirs. But how little fun we should have, some of us, if this arrangement as to experience being non-transferable had never been made.

Most grandfathers die when their grandchildren are very young; many before these are born. Rudd was not old enough to appreciate his grandfather before it was too late; but he loved Sunday morning because after church his father, mother and himself always visited the old people's house and walked in the garden, where, on the edges of the smoothest and greenest lawn, and in circular and oval beds cut in it, were the reddest geraniums, the yellowest calceolarias and the bluest lobelias. For those were the days when all the fashionable flowers that we now worship were to be

found only in cottage gardens. Gentlemen's places were distinguished by their geraniums, and carpet bedding was the only correct thing. Herbaceous borders were an eccentricity, a bid for an odd reputation.

Having walked about the lawn as long as he wished, Rudd used to slip off to the greenhouse to hunt for the tortoise and pinch the fuchsia buds to make them go pop, for in those days fuchsias were still thought beautiful by the old and found entertaining by the young. He would then pick a lemon verbena leaf and carry it to his mother. On a week-day Rudd would hasten to possess himself of a croquet mallet, but on Sundays no croquet was allowed, nor were the hoops and coloured sticks left up, but all put away in their box, so that not even the venial offence of ringing the bell in the central cage was left. None the less the Sunday visit, with all the innocuous mildness of its excitements, was a treasured event.

Rudd's grandfather, his mother's father, was smooth shaven, with very white soft hair. He dressed in black with a wide-brimmed tall hat.

Whenever a grandchild was born he gave it a sovereign and was much entertained by the way in which the baby treated it. Rudd at once allowed his coin to fall on the floor. "Tut, tut! a spendthrift!" said his grandfather, chuckling. In the pocket of the first knickerbockers there was always a shilling from the same hand. For years Rudd believed that it was a present from the tailor; and indeed, not till he was a grown man did he cease to feel for a coin in any new

suit and arrive sadly and finally at the conclusion that tailors are not like that.

His grandfather was hard on seventy when Rudd was born; he died when Rudd was eight, years and years too soon, for they were great friends and would have been greater.

Although Rudd was so young he never lost the visual remembrance of his grandfather. It was one of the faces that he could always conjure up, even when the features of those much nearer to him refused to obey the call. The caprice of memory is never so noticeable as under these evocations. Your dearest friend, whom you left only this afternoon, can refuse to emerge from the void, while every lineament and gesture of the waiter who served you that night at Chatillon's ten years ago may be summoned and studied at will. Rudd, at any moment, could see his grandfather's gentle, refined face, his slow, thoughtful walk.

Rudd liked to walk with him, and was often allowed to accompany him back to "Sunnyside," which was not far, returning alone. On one occasion he noticed a shabby man creep up behind his grandfather, whose hands were behind him, take something from one of those hands, and disappear.

At the gate was Rudd's grandmother, who had seen it too.

"You have been giving that worthless beggar money again!" she said reprovingly.

"No, my dear," replied Rudd's grandfather, smil-

ingly defending himself, "I didn't give it; he took it."

Hovering between his wife's prohibition as to giving alms to this particular rogue, and his own softness of heart, the kind old gentleman had laid a sixpence on his open palm and awaited events.

At "Sunnyside," Rudd's grandfather's house, certain toys were kept for grandchildren on their visits—toys which had already satisfied more than one generation; and these alone made a party there a tremendous event.

But there were other things, too, which Rudd always remembered, chief of which was the texture of the cloth which was laid on the dining-room table between meals, and was as thick almost as a carpet, but softer, and in its floral pattern rather like one; and the tick of the wonderful ormolu and marble clock on the mantelpiece under a glass shade. This tick he learned as he played with the ancestral toys on the splendid table-cloth in the afternoon, but so silently as not on any acount to disturb his grandfather, who took a nap that time, under a bandana handkerchief.

Parties at "Sunnyside" were naturally anticipated by the grandchildren with the utmost interest. But the finest party of all, and alas the last, was on the old gentleman's seventy-fifth birthday, for then all the families met, not to give but to receive presents. They could give them too if they liked, but Rudd's grandfather's wish was that they should primarily receive.

These presents were piled round a Christmas tree, and were real presents: something to keep with care and use with ceremony.

One by one the mysterious parcels were distributed among the cousins.

Henry came first, with a tool-box as big as a portmanteau. Every conceivable tool was there, from an axe downwards; Henry would be able to sever each finger and each toe with a different weapon, and still have enough left for scores of minor injuries. The other children looked on in envy and not a little perplexity as to their own future, for what present could be as good as that?

Then came Anne, next in age, the eldest of the second family of grandchildren, and her gift was a workbox, complete in every particular, lined with flounced satin, with a lock and key, and a thimble of solid gold, silks of myriad hues, and an armoury of shining scissors, bodkins and needles.

Rudd's envy had a rest, although not a complete one, for he knew of a thousand things to do with a box divided into compartments like that, apart altogether from such rubbish as needlework. Henry and Anne equally were in raptures.

Next came Ernest to join them in ecstasy over a tool-chest like Henry's.

Next came Meta, to whose enraptured eyes was revealed a paint-box of polished mahogany, with two layers of lustrous cakes of paint (the old hard kind), with their names under each: cobalt, vermilion, mad-

der brown, crimson lake (so pleasant to the taste), burnt sienna, and so forth, a dozen small brushes, a large flat one, a water glass, and underneath, in a drawer all to itself, whose opening was half a secret, a white porcelain palette. Such a paint-box surely never had before left the shop-windows, never had become the possession of a private individual!

Rudd had a paint-box of his own with which he coloured outline drawings on week-days, and on Sundays illuminated texts (with the exciting addition of a bottle of gold paint), but this magnificent thing of Meta's pauperized it. And Meta was no hand at art either!

And now it was Rudd's turn.

A bulky parcel of white tissue paper was placed in his hands, and, surrounded by the cousins and trembling with excitement, he opened it. And what was it? Another paint-box? No. A compendium of games? No. Anything sensible or proper on such an occasion as this? No.

It was a book.

A book!

And not even a book of stories, but poetry!

True, it was a beautiful book, most luxuriously bound in blue leather, and it had pictures and gilt edges: but after the tool-chest and the paint-box . . . !

Rudd burst into tears. He cried and cried and cried; nothing could console him; and he was led away.

But years after, when Meta's paint-box had lost all its colours, and of Henry's tools not a vestige remained save the scars on Henry's person, Rudd could still turn to his book and read again his early favourites: "Kubla Khan," "The Ancient Mariner," "The Deserted Village," "The Highland Reaper" and "The Old Familiar Faces." His grandfather was perhaps not so wrong, after all.

But at the time the old gentleman was as unhappy almost as the child.

CHAPTER III

FIRST GLIMPSE OF JESUITRY

HAVING just left his mother in her sitting-room, Rudd was standing in the hall wondering whether he would go for a walk or play in the garden. He was rather in favour of a walk, but there was always the risk of meeting Oran.

Oran was a lame boy who terrorized the neighbourhood. He had one very high boot with an enormous sole and heel, and a crutch, but he could get over the ground faster than most boys even of his own age, while no little boy could escape him. It was terrible to hear his crutch clattering behind you as you ran.

Oran was an incipient magnate: he took small boys' property from them—their tops, marbles, pencils—and never returned it; he teased them about their clothes; he twisted their arms, and used bad words. Rudd was not only in his person miserably afraid of Oran's powers, but his little soul was disturbed too: he had the feeling that it was doubly wrong for a lame boy to be wicked. It was long indeed before he lost this idea, and longer still before he ceased to believe that the blind were pre-eminently set apart for virtue.

Just as Rudd had decided to run the risk of an encounter with Oran, and was emptying his pockets by way of precaution, the bell rang. This was always an event, and Rudd withdrew into that convenient hiding-place, the overcoat recess, to hear who it was.

In the course of a minute or so Jane tripped along the passage and opened the door.

"Is Mrs. Sergison at home?" Rudd heard a voice inquire.

"I'm sorry but she's not," Jane replied.

Nothing kept Rudd from bursting from his lair and setting right this monstrous error but the circumstance that he had been forbidden to eavesdrop, as he was now doing. But of all the whoppers! Why, Jane had but just taken up Mrs. Sergison's tea.

"Are you quite sure?" the voice asked.

"Quite, ma'am," said Jane, and was not struck dead. Rudd tremblingly listened for the fall of the corpse; but it never came.

The voice murmured acquiescence, and Jane shut the door.

Rudd all unstrung and dismayed tackled her.

"Jane," he said in reproachful tones, "Jane! how could you?"

"Lor', how you made me jump!" said Jane. "How could I what?"

"How could you tell such a story? Mother's upstairs. You know she is."

"Of course I know she is," said Jane, "but she's not at home to anyone. She told me herself."

"Mother told you?" Rudd said incredulously.

"Yes, Master Inquisitive, she did," said Jane.

"But she *is* at home," said Rudd.

"Don't you worry about things you can't understand," said Jane, and returned to her work.

But Rudd had to have this out. The whole fabric of morality was tottering.

Mrs. Sergison had little courage in facing the anomalies of life. The sum of her teaching was that Rudd should be good and kind and unselfish. With his questions as to the darker side of the world she fenced, or put him off with the remark that there were certain things we were not intended to understand. Her belief that a Providence had placed us here and watched every movement, was unshakable. Nothing in the daily papers could rub even a grain of bloom from that conviction. Rudd, therefore, had grown into the habit of laying certain difficulties before Sarah rather than his mother. Sarah at any rate made some attempt at solution.

Even when an upper floor too heavily weighted one Sunday evening by a congregation singing "The Old Hundredth" had given way, and scores of the singers were killed or injured, Mrs. Sergison had no hesitancies. To Rudd, who had heard Mr. Sergison reading about it at breakfast, it had been bewildering and outrageous.

"Why did God let it happen?" he asked and asked.

"It is not for us to understand His ways," said Mrs. Sergison. "Now have some marmalade."

But Rudd was not momentarily interested in marmalade: he was remembering the text about the sparrows, one of his mother's favourites. Not one could fall to the ground without His knowledge, and here were all these religious people singing His praises, mangled . . .

"But," he began with wide eyes . . .

"My little boy mustn't question God's ways," said Mrs. Sergison. "Now say Grace and run upstairs."

Rudd looked to his father, but he was deep in the Stock Exchange quotations. Very thoughtfully he left the room.

Upstairs he told Sarah about it.

"How is it?" he asked.

Sarah was orthodox, too, but her mind was more practical and more investigative. She liked reasons.

"The floor was weak," she said. "They ought never to have been up there at all. It wasn't safe."

"But they were allowed to go up, and they were singing, 'O Thou from whom all blessings flow,'" said Rudd.

"Well," said Sarah, "I suppose one of those blessings is common sense, and they had forgotten to use it. The floor was rotten. Even Christians have got to be sensible. It was a lesson to the rest of them."

But to-day's problem was far more serious than that. To-day's problem involved the truthfulness

of the fountain-head of truth, his mother. It was not academic: it was terribly intimate and vital. And Sarah was out.

"Oh, mother," he cried, bursting into Mrs. Sergison's room, "such a dreadful thing's happened."

"What is it?" Mrs. Sergison asked in alarm.

"Why," said Rudd, "somebody called to see you, and Jane said you were not at home, and you *are*!"

"Who was it?" Mrs. Sergison inquired.

"I don't know," said Rudd. "But Jane said you were not at home, and she knew that you were, and it's a story, a dreadful story. And Jane says you told her to tell it."

Mrs. Sergison drew the boy to her. "'Not at home' means I don't want to see any callers," she said.

"But it was a story," said Rudd.

"No, not a story. It's a regular form of words meaning that."

"But if you *are* at home," said Rudd, "it must be a story."

"Listen," said Mrs. Sergison. "You don't think I'm a story-teller, do you?"

"No," said Rudd.

"Nor Jane?"

"N-n-no," said Rudd, with less confidence.

"And we're not. 'At home' means ready to see callers. 'Not at home' means not ready to see them. That's all. Now you understand?"

Rudd looked the picture of perplexity.

Mrs. Sergison kissed him. "You are quite right to be troubled about it," she said. "Stories are very wrong. But this only *sounded* like one. You are sure you see?"

"I'm trying to," said Rudd.

"Very well," said his mother. "Now go and ask Jane who it was. I hope it was no one I should have liked to have seen."

Rudd went, in a stupor.

When he was going to bed he related the incident to Sarah.

"It wasn't telling the truth, was it?" he said.

Sarah, who disliked Society and its pretences, agreed that it was not.

"Because mother was *in*," he continued. "She *was* at home. She was at home all the time."

"You must forget it," said Sarah. "It's a regular thing they say. Your mother didn't invent it, and I'm sure she doesn't like using it."

"What I think is," said Rudd, "that Jane ought to have said, 'Mrs. Sergison is at home, but she doesn't want to see you.' That would have been the truth."

CHAPTER IV

ENTERTAINERS, AND A SHOCK

RUDD'S mother, loving and solicitous as she was, was, after all, like many mothers, only his walking-stick. His crutch was Sarah. Mrs. Sergison's first duties were to her husband; Sarah's only duties were to Rudd.

Sarah Juniper had had charge of him from his earliest moments. She dressed him and undressed him, and between those two great events she was his constant companion.

She was a plain but pleasant looking woman of between thirty-five and forty, in a mauve print dress. Her hands were rough and powerful, as Rudd knew when she had occasion to hold him firmly, which happened now and then when he had been naughty and must be forcibly got back in the house, or when the cod-liver-oil season set in.

Certain crusted scraps of nursery wisdom were in Sarah's repertory, such as "Little boys should be seen and not heard"; and "Fingers were made before forks"; and "Little Pitchers have long ears"; and

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"It is a sin to steal a pin"; and "See a pin and pick it up"—and so forth.

Experience had provided her with lessons too, and she was never tired of reminding Rudd that nothing is ever so bad as we expect it will be. That nothing also is ever so good as we expect, she probably knew too, but being an excellent nurse she did not urge that upon him. Such disenchanting truths can be reserved for one's own acquisition in the school of the world; it is the lenitives with which the instructors of childhood are concerned.

But Sarah was not wholly didactic: she had her moments of levity too; nurses' levity. She and Rudd had tremendous giggling struggles over the ancient and perilous problem contained in the lines:—

> "Adam and Eve and Pinch-me
> Went down to the river to bathe.
> Adam and Eve were drowned,
> But who do you think was saved?"

On every fine day Rudd and Sarah walked by the sea, which was reached by descending a steep hill.

On very special occasions they went on the pier. Rudd was now and then permitted to fish from it while Sarah sewed. His bait was wet dough from the kitchen, which was placed on two hooks suspended from each end of a stiff wire attached to a weight. He never caught anything, but it was exciting to be at the end of so important a piece of string.

In warm weather he paddled. But the greatest treat of all was to hunt for anemones among the rocks a mile or so from the town and bring them home to live in glass jars. He always kept a piece of seaweed just outside the nursery window to foretell the weather. When his father was away, strange marine creatures often had possession of the bath.

When paddling was not possible, owing to the cold or the high tide, Rudd and Sarah would walk slowly along the Front and study the performers.

Best of all the entertainers Rudd liked Don Patos.

Don Patos was a pathetic Spanish nobleman of aristocratic mien. He had moustaches and an imperial waxed at the ends in the manner of Napoleon III. His face was pale and anxious.

Don Patos was unique among the performers. He was pushed to his pitch below the promenade in a bath-chair, the motive power of which was a stout and rather shabby lady who was understood to be his wife. She spoke English and might have been English. When he was established she would begin to shake a tambourine while the Don watched the little band of spectators slowly increasing. When he judged that the crowd was large enough or rich enough he extricated himself by means of a crutch and moved painfully to the centre of the ring. For he had but one leg. There he flung off his black covering and revealed himself garbed in dazzling red and gold, with a large flowing cloak over all. But he revealed more than this, for it was now that the

observer noticed the most wonderful thing about him, which was the remarkable oneness of his one leg. There was no doubt about it; the Don was pre-eminently a one-legged man. There was not an inch of the other to be seen; it was as non-existent as that of a resting stork.

Don Patos, having arranged his draperies, would make as stately an obeisance as a one-legged man can do—and far more stately, owing to his aristocratic mien, than many a biped—and begin to revolve on his solitary foot, while his wife beat and rattled the tambourine with more energy and more.

Faster and faster would the Don rotate, while his cloak flew out all around him: a magnificent and melancholy human top.

But his culminating achievement was the arum-lily dance. For this he exchanged his coloured cloak for a white one, and whirled and twirled on his solitary foot until the cloak resembled the chalice and his head and shoulders the pistil of that funereal flower.

He would then gradually subside until he came to a standstill again, again bow and hop back to his bath-chair, from which he would look with grave and faintly appealing eyes at the spectators as his wife passed among them with her tambourine, now transformed into an offertory plate.

One-legged, and absurd as was his performance, the Don never lost dignity. How often a day he gyrated, I cannot say, but never enough for Rudd, who tore himself away from the Don with difficulty,

no matter how fascinating a neighbouring entertainment might be.

And sometimes he would see the Don being pushed homewards in a distant street, always pale and distinguished and foreign, always the Spanish nobleman, and thrill at the recognition, as we poor ordinary mortals always have thrilled and always will thrill at the spectacle of public performers in any phase of private life.

The Don fascinated Rudd by his wistfulness and aloofness. There was also a huge negro entertainer who fascinated him through his fears.

This man's performance was unique too. He carried with him a little bundle of thin white tapering sticks about three feet long, and these, with the aid of a piece of string, he threw to enormous heights over the big hotels. He first intimated what he would do, and then asked for a shilling's worth of coppers before he would do it. Rudd saw him so often that he grew to estimate the generosity of an audience as accurately as the negro himself. He would look at the crowd and know to a penny what they were worth and what were his chances of seeing this alluring feat again.

At last the money would all be collected, several little boys assisting the negro in harvesting it, and then, after far too much prefatory palaver, he would begin. Can it have been impatience under these preliminaries—the graspingness, the interminable talk—that set up in the child a revolt against ceremonial

and redundancy which lasted till the end and made him always swift and direct? If so, how little the big negro knew it! And even the conscious teachers perhaps instruct best when they are least conscious.

But when the stick was thrown it was splendid. The negro would point to its passage through the air, his great white teeth and wide nose watching it too. Sometimes Rudd could not see it as it went up, but at some point its whiteness would catch the light and gleam in the sky; and then down it came again, usually very near to the point from which it was thrown (but not so near as the negro had promised), and another servile little boy would retrieve it.

The negro would then place a piece of board in his mouth and balance a boy on it, to prove how strong were his teeth.

So far he had done nothing terrifying; but he always finished his performance in that mood. He turned his back, a great smiling creature, and then, turning again, was a horrible snarling beast, with huge fangs and a foaming mouth and red eyes. Thus disguised he made rushes at the small boys, from which they fled shrieking. He kept these fangs in his waistcoat pocket, but he was not the less frightening for that. Rudd would not have left the security of the upper promenade for anything.

Then there was a conjurer who carried a tiny circular red table-top and three collapsible legs under his arm, to set up here and there by the railings

among the cabs. He did not perform on the lower pavement, because that would have given his audience's eyes an unfair advantage. He was an elderly stooping man deeply pitted with small-pox, and his two great tricks were done with three cups and balls and a guinea-pig and a hat.

Rudd saw him do these a thousand times and never discovered the exact moment when the three potatoes got under the cups instead of the little balls, or at what instant the guinea-pig left his pocket and took the place of the cabbage under the hat. But that the guinea-pig lived in his pocket he knew, because the man's coat was getting so old that the pocket sagged and you could see its nose twitching.

For Punch and Judy Rudd cared very little, but it was a great day when two brothers who were Thought Readers arrived. One was blindfolded, while the other passed among the people and asked the blindfolded one to state what he had in his hand. Talk about magic! These were magicians, if you like. The blindfolded brother hardly ever made a mistake, and if he chanced to do so, it needed only two or three more questions to put him on the right tack. And always when the other brother laid his hand on a perambulator (as he did at some period during every performance) and asked what was there, the blindfolded brother replied, "A beautiful baby," and always when the other brother continued, "Yes, but say now what is the colour of the baby's eyes?" the

blindfolded brother replied, "The colour of the baby's eyes are blew."

And the niggers! They were, when all is said, the most satisfactory of all, for they often had new songs, and they threw up the sponge much later than the others, since when the autumn came they would take their stand in a street and make things lively there, whereas the Thought Readers and the big negro and the other sun-beetles disappeared till next year.

One or two of the niggers came to know Sarah and Rudd quite well, and had little jokes with Sarah, and they were the only performers who ever succeeded in extracting a penny from her shabby black purse. Rudd used to long for her to give the Don something, but Sarah refused. She had patriotic prejudices. She didn't hold with foreigners.

The first comic songs that Rudd heard were "Tommy, make room for your Uncle," and "Over the Garden Wall." Years after he had but to catch an echo of "Over the Garden Wall" in any more recent song to be conscious at once of the hot asphalt smell of the Front under the summer sun. The first serious song to capture him was "Nancy Lee."

There was a ventriloquist too, but Rudd had a very low opinion of him because you could see his mouth move. And a blind tenor, but his songs were sentimental, and of course the duty of singers on the Front was to be funny; and a blind whistler; and

an old man who sold for a penny magnifying glasses with which on sunny days he would light his pipe.

But these were ordinary people, fairly easily passed by without even a second tug at Sarah's hand. Don Patos and the terrible negro were different. They compelled attention.

But were they landmarks? I hear you ask. Surely the life of no boy is worth writing to whom a nigger and a one-legged Spanish pirouetting gentleman had the dignity of landmarks? Quite so. And the landmark follows: these were merely an ingredient of it; for one day all this mile of fun and interest lost its savour.

You must understand that Rudd knew what it was to be ducked beneath the surface even of the placid waters. Foolish bathing women, too stupid to realize that this alien and hostile element must be allowed to woo—that the approval of sea and child must be mutual—had too often forced him under in a passion of revolt with mouth still open in protest, and landed him half choked and infuriated.

It happened that during breakfast Mr. Sergison read out an account of a tidal wave which had engulfed a large part of an island in the Pacific. The natives, all unsuspecting, had been pursuing their life in the usual manner, when suddenly a mighty and dreadful sound was heard, growing louder and nearer, and out at sea a huge green wall with a roaring foaming top to it was seen advancing steadily on the shore.

Those natives who saw it rushed, shrieking madly, up the hills.

On and on it came with appalling swiftness and more and more noise, twenty feet high, and then, sliding over the shore, carried all before it. Only those who were on high enough ground were saved to tell the awful tale.

Rudd listened in horror. A tidal wave. That was the end of the Front for him. At any moment one might come; and then . . .

Mrs. Sergison noticed his white panic-stricken face and called on her husband to stop; but the mischief was done. Rudd could never forget it.

It was in vain that it was explained to him that such upheavals were caused by earthquakes or volcanoes under the sea, and that there were no earthquakes or volcanoes in our parts; he clung to his fear. Not only did he refuse to descend the hill to the sea, but he refused to look at the sea from the heights lest the great advancing green wall of water might at that moment come into view, with its roaring foaming crest, advancing, advancing, to drown every one down there on that perilous shore.

Anything almost was better than such a death as that.

He thought of all the performers who would be submerged for ever; but most of all poor Don Patos. The niggers might get away, the big negro certainly would; but how could the Don escape with only one leg?

It was weeks before Rudd could be happy by the sea again, and then at any moment the fear of the wave might come, and, looking nervously backward, he would tug at Sarah's hand as they hurried up the hill.

For years afterward the tidal wave occupied a capacious loose-box in his nightmares' stable—a gigantic overwhelming green wall of water in which a one-legged man in a scarlet cloak vainly struggled.

CHAPTER V

THE NICE GARDENER AND A PROBLEM

UNCLE HECTOR, who was a soldier, having been made governor of a prison, the Sergisons paid him a week-end visit in his new quarters.

The prison was on a hill on the edge of a county town. It had very high walls all round it, with spikes on the top, and a gloomy gateway with iron-studded doors which opened only to allow the prison van to rumble through, bringing new prisoners; but Uncle Hector's own quarters were comfortable and cheerful enough, and his garden was gay and pretty, with a croquet lawn and a summer house.

When Rudd heard that he was going on a visit to so terrible a place as a prison he was frightened and unwilling; but curiosity and excitement combined to conquer this reluctance. Still, he shuddered when he was alone and thought of all the bad men kept there. Supposing one should get out and break into the Governor's room for revenge . . .

"I'm sure you'd like to go through the prison with me," Uncle Hector said.

But Rudd shrank from the idea. He had a horror

of bad people. It was uncomfortable enough to be so near them as this; he did not want to see their wicked faces.

"An empty cell," said Uncle Hector—"wouldn't you like to see that?"

But Rudd shrank from that too.

After lunch he was thrown on his own resources, and he would have found the time a little heavy but for Uncle Hector's garden, to which he took an old volume of *Punch*.

He had not long been reading, or rather looking at the pictures, when the gardener came in with a can and began to water the flowers.

He was a strong, stout man with a short grey beard. He looked at Rudd now and then and smiled. Rudd found himself looking at the gardener oftener than at *Punch*.

Gradually the watering brought the gardener close to Rudd's seat. "Hullo, sonny!" he said.

"Hullo!" said Rudd.

'What do you think of life?" the gardener asked.

Rudd had never thought of life, so he merely smiled perplexedly.

"A rum business, isn't it?" said the gardener.

"Is it?" Rudd asked.

"Not to you—yet," said the gardener. "Tell me, sonny, you do pretty much as you like, I suppose? Go where you will, with your hands in your pockets, don't you?"

Rudd acquiesced.

"Tell me what it feels like to do as you like," said the gardener. "Whew!" he whistled, "but I must get on with my work."

The next time he came round the gardener asked Rudd where he lived, and when Rudd said at Caston he wanted to know if the sea there was still wet and blue, as it used to be a thousand years ago.

"How do you know what it was like a thousand years ago?" Rudd asked, and the gardener said that he could not explain it, but he did.

When Rudd asked him where he lived, the gardener said he was a guest of the Queen, who was a very hospitable lady and liked him so much that she couldn't bear to let him go.

"But I thought the Queen lived in London," Rudd said.

"She does," said the gardener, "but she has a number of palaces—or, as you might say, hotels—for her guests, in other parts of the country."

"Is she very nice?" Rudd asked.

"Very," said the gardener. "God save the Queen!" and he laughed.

"Is that *Punch*?" he added, looking at Rudd's book. "Does it still come out? Fancy seeing *Punch* again!"

"Of course it comes out," said Rudd. "Father gets it every week. You can buy it at the station. I saw some there."

"I'm not much of one to go to the station," said

the gardener. "I haven't been out of this place for years."

"Years!" exclaimed Rudd in astonishment. "Not in the evening?"

"No," said the gardener.

"Not on Sundays?" Rudd asked.

"No," said the gardener.

"The Queen must be very fond of you," said Rudd, "if she won't even let you go into the town."

"She is," said the gardener. "She says, 'Now we've really got him we must take the greatest possible care of him.' And she does."

Rudd pondered deeply, but it was all too mysterious for him. Still, he found the conversation absorbingly interesting.

Having been asked his name, and told it, Rudd asked the gardener to tell him his.

"I haven't got one," said the gardener. "I've lost it. The Queen is very funny about names—she doesn't like them. So she gives all her guests numbers instead. My number is 231."

"How long will you stay with her?" Rudd asked, and the gardener said that he didn't quite know, but he thought for another eighteen months.

"And then where will you go?" Rudd asked, and was astonished at the strange smile which came into the gardener's face.

"Where shall I go?" he said. "Ah, where shan't I go? But first of all to London."

"Yes," said Rudd, "that is where I should go first."

"That's right," said the gardener. "There's nothing like it. You can be quiet there."

Quiet! thought Rudd. He didn't want to be quiet. "But I should want to see things," he said, "when I went to London. The Zoo and the Tower and Piccadilly Circus. I love circuses. Wouldn't you?"

The gardener shook his grey head.

"What would you do first?" Rudd asked.

"First?" he said. "First I should go to a restaurant I know of, for—what do you think?"

"A pork pie," said Rudd.

"No," said the gardener, "for some saddle of mutton with red currant jelly and a bottle of claret; then some Stilton cheese and a glass of port; and then a cigar. After that I have no plans."

Rudd thought he was the funniest person he had ever met. Fancy thinking like that about mutton, that horrid stuff.

"Where are you going to garden when you leave the Queen?" Rudd asked. "We keep a gardener," he added. "I wish you'd come to us. Do."

"I don't know," said 231, "whether I won't give up gardening. I haven't decided yet. Perhaps I shall have a gardener of my own."

This was an enormous idea to Rudd. A gardener keep a gardener! His eyes grew very wide.

"You'd want to be rather rich, wouldn't you?" he said.

"I hope to be," said 231; "don't you?"

"I am," said Rudd simply, "I've got nearly two pounds. I had a sovereign when I was born."

The gardener asked Rudd what he was going to be when he grew up, and Rudd said he hadn't decided yet, but most probably either a railway guard or a lamplighter. "I suppose you've always been a gardener," he added.

"I have been all kinds of things," said 231. "In fact, gardening came late in life. I've even been a traveller," and he told Rudd curious and fascinating stories about foreign lands: and what Sydney harbour was like, and how San Francisco looked from the sea, and how strange the China Town there was, and about flying-fishes and whales, until Rudd realized that to carry a long pole with a light at the end, or to jump on a train after it had started, was not all. Travel was the thing. Long voyages. And what a travelling companion was this delightful man!

And when Rudd fell over a croquet hoop and made his nose bleed, the gardener was very kind to him, and took him to his shed and bathed his face and put a cold key down his back. Altogether Rudd thought him the nicest casual acquaintance he had ever met.

When he went in to tea and was asked how he had been spending the time, Rudd said that he had been talking to the gardener.

"I'm afraid," said Uncle Hector, laughing, "that Rudd has fallen into bad company."

Rudd looked up with a start.

"As a matter of fact," Uncle Hector continued, "my garden at the moment is being attended to by a notorious criminal, no less a person than the famous Tyser, the swindler, himself."

"Not the scoundrel who ruined all those small investors?" said Mrs. Sergison.

"The very man," said Uncle Hector.

Rudd's face went scarlet. His blood surged.

"But he told me he was staying with the Queen," he said. "Surely she wouldn't have swindlers to stay with her?"

Uncle Hector laughed. "He's a very amusing fellow," he said; "he meant that he is a prisoner."

Rudd's head swam. His nice gardener a swindler and a prisoner. A notorious criminal. But how then could he be nice? Surely prisoners were gloomy men with sullen faces? How could they be amusing and friendly? They were wicked. Rudd was puzzled and silent all the evening.

When his mother came to say good-night he put the case to her. "If 231 wasn't really wicked he would not be in prison, would he?"

"No," she said. The nuances of right and wrong: the mingled skein of character: the shades of grey between the black and the white; how could she explain these to a child? Better say nothing.

"But if he was really wicked how could he laugh and be so kind and so jolly?"

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Sergison, with an inspiration, "he is sorry and has repented, and is now beginning

to feel happy again. Just like you after you have been punished and forgiven."

"Then they ought to let him free," said Rudd. "Shouldn't they?"

Mrs. Sergison here chose the better part of valour and urged Rudd to go to sleep.

"Shouldn't they?" Rudd repeated.

"It's for the judges and wise people to decide," said Mrs. Sergison, "not for us," and kissed him good-night.

Rudd puzzled over it for a long time. To be so wicked—a ruiner of familes, his father had said—and so nice. To be so nice and so wicked. To be so kind and a prisoner. To be a prisoner and so kind.—So his thoughts ran until he slept.

He was not altogether sorry the next day that it was Sunday and there was no garden work to be done; and on the Monday morning they went home again.

And yet he wished too that he could see the gardener once more. He wanted to examine his face in a new way. He had been so kind and had smiled so gaily. Was it all put on? And to be so near one who, whatever his present state of virtue, had once been that terrible thing, a notorious criminal, a swindler, a ruiner of families—that would be frightfully exciting.

But all the fun would have gone—of that Rudd was indistinctly sure.

CHAPTER VI

THE TERRIFYING LAW

SARAH JUNIPER'S sister Kate had married a small farmer who lived a dozen miles from Caston, and every year Rudd and Sarah stayed there for a week or so when Mr. and Mrs. Sergison were away in Scotland or something was being done to the house.

Mr. Hoadley, the farmer, who had no children of his own, was fond of Rudd and took him on his daily rounds. Now and then they visited the neighbouring markets together, where Rudd participated in the sale or purchase of sheep and calves, and once they bought a horse which Rudd helped to lead home. Rudd had an ash stick with which to prod beasts as a test of their fatness. He learned to utter strange sounds of encouragement to a team.

In the evening Mr. Hoadley would join in a game of cards, the game being a geographical form of "Families." The fathers were the English counties, and the children consisted of four prominent towns in each, these towns being depicted very gaily on the cards.

"Perhaps," Mr. Hoadley would say when his turn came round, having in mind some previous inquiries on behalf of Warwickshire by his young friend; "Perhaps, Master Rudd, you will give me Leamington?"

"I'm sorry," said Rudd, "but I can't oblige. But I shall be glad if you will give me Warwick."

And Mr. Hoadley would disgorge Warwick with every appearance of discontent.

"And Rugby," Rudd would add, thus depriving Mr. Hoadley of his last Warwickshire possession.

On these visits Rudd was rapturously happy, for Nature was always his friend. Each morning he himself found the new-laid egg for his breakfast and with a sand-glass timed its boiling, which is a very exciting thing to do; and then came the round of inspection with Mr. Hoadley. The rest of the day was given to desultory play about the farm, helping to cut chaff or slice mangolds, nibbling oat cake (of which he grew rapturously fond), shovelling corn with a wooden spade, putting purple mottled beans into sacks, climbing the hay-stacks, or going with Sarah for flower-picking walks.

Sarah, being country-bred, knew many things. She knew that milk-wort is good for warts, that the heads of barley will run up your sleeve, that burrs will stick on clothes, that the mallow has a little cheese inside it and the periwinkle a little broom, and that nettles won't sting this month.

A mile away there was a deserted Elizabethan

house which at once repelled and fascinated Rudd. He would not have entered it alone for anything, and even with Sarah he was afraid; but with Sarah he could and would do it. It was overgrown with ivy, and bats and owls inhabited it; the diamond panes had gone from the windows; the doors were off their hinges; the garden was full of weeds head-high. Tightly holding Sarah's hand Rudd passed quiveringly from room to room, and when they came away he cast fearful looks back and accelerated her steps. Yet he always wanted to go there again. With Sarah he would do anything, for she had never betrayed him.

The kitchen where the happy, happy evenings were spent was a low Tudor room with a black ceiling and blacker beams, and a gun over the mantelpiece. It smelt all day of burning wood and all night of Mr. Hoadley's tobacco.

On one of Rudd's spring visits to the Hoadleys' there hung from a nail on a beam a string on which had been threaded a dozen or so of birds' eggs which Sarah and he had found. He was limited to one from each nest; but he was an active collector and quickly brought together a nice little assortment.

The eggs were blown through a hole at each end, and they made a pretty necklace with their gay and soft colourings: the tender pure azure of the hedge sparrow, the blood-spotted robin, the hieroglyphed chaffinch, and the bold black markings on the thrush's blue. They were Rudd's greatest treasure.

One evening when Sarah was out, just as cards were beginning, a stern knock was heard at the door and in strode the village policeman.

It was the first time that Rudd had ever been in the same room with a policeman, and he was properly nervous. Although belonging to a class into whose ranks the police seldom break, at any rate as terrifiers of the young, Rudd shared Small England's ordinary misgivings as to the men in blue. They were enemies, he knew, the police and boys, boys and the police, although he knew it only vaguely. The fact was remote, but it was a fact none the less.

"I suppose you've come about those birds' eggs," said Mr. Hoadley, with a broad wink to the constable, which Rudd did not see. Mr. Hoadley was the kind of humorist that requires a victim.

The policeman, following Mr. Hoadley's gaze, fixed his eyes on the string, and Rudd turned cold. He remembered indistinctly but terrifyingly something he had heard regarding the protection of wild birds. If only Sarah were in!

"Let's see, what's the punishment for taking eggs this year?" Mr. Hoadley went on, ruthlessly facetious.

Rudd quaked and shivered, not only with fear but with the sudden knowledge that one of his best friends could be treacherous.

The policeman, doing his best to be a jester too, affected to feel his pocket for documents or possibly even handcuffs; but Rudd could stand no more. He burst into tears and the joke was over.

It was explained away and the policeman developed all kinds of ingratiating human traits, but the shock had been too severe, and for a long time Rudd was inconsolable.

Mrs. Hoadley reproached her husband with severity.

"It's always like that with Hoadley's jokes," she said. "He goes too far."

"Only a bit of fun, missûs," said the crestfallen wag. "Here, Master Rudd, come and help me wind up my watch."

And Rudd warily approached him, with perplexity still on his face.

But it was not until the policeman went that he could breathe fairly naturally again.

Mr. Hoadley worked vigorously to undo his mischief, but he had no luck that night. In the morning, however, he found a squirrel's nest blown to the ground with four young squirrels dead in it, and his promise to have one of these stuffed for Rudd and set up realistically in its case by the village taxidermist, restored the boy's confidence. Together they descended the street to arrange for the work of art.

Thus was the memory of the evening made misty; but it was never effaced. Thereafter for ever a policeman was a menace too, and for a while the birds of that district retained their full clutches.

CHAPTER VII

A BETRAYAL

SARAH, as I have said, was Rudd's confidant, comforter, and rock. She was, to his eyes, complete; trustworthy beyond any test; and in being his nurse, her destiny was fulfilled.

Had Rudd been a little girl instead of a little boy, perhaps Sarah would have been more communicative, and hints that she too was a woman and liable to weakness might have leaked out, if not actual stories of emotional hopes and fears and triumphs. But Rudd knew only that Sarah had been born and bred in order to be his nurse and see that his stockings were mended, that he had enough handkerchiefs, that his hair was tidy, his nails clean (or thereabouts), to accompany him for walks, and in stressful times be ready with the arnica.

But Sarah Juniper, although to Rudd she was patriarchal, was to the eye of the world a woman of comfortable build and by no means past her prime, if indeed she had yet reached it. That she had admirers, is certain, but her manner with those whom

she resented, and Rudd knew nothing of any others, was distant and steely.

Thus, when the butcher's young man, whom Rudd envied immensely because he drove so fast both up and down hill, and never wore a hat over his beautifully greased hair, sent Sarah a Christmas card, she threw it at once on the fire.

Rudd watched the action with horror. Christmas cards at that time were still treasurable articles of some value: Rudd had an album in which his were carefully pasted, with the name of the sender and the year underneath; and besides, Christmas was sacred. If the butcher's young man had sent him a card it would have a place of honour. And Sarah had burnt hers! For a moment Rudd wavered in his allegiance to this power; but he quickly recovered—Sarah could do no wrong.

Still, how different from Annie, the housemaid, who boasted of her admirers, and displayed all their presents, and just across the road, in full view, was openly waited for on her Sunday afternoons and evenings out, by a young man who worked at the grocer's!

Why Annie should be so fond of her Ted, and Sarah should burn the butcher's young man's Christmas card, Rudd had no notion. Yet the disparity did not really trouble him, for Sarah was above criticism.

And then he had a shock.

One day on one of the visits to the Hoadleys,

Sarah was surprisingly lively in a new way. Commonly so calm and unenthusiastic, taking things as they came with unruffled acceptance ("He who sends the flea sends the finger nail," was one of her sayings), Sarah surprised Rudd by becoming jumpy and gay. At intervals she sang a few lines of a song with a pretty tune:

"A starry night for a ramble
In the flowery dell,
Through the bush and bramble,
Kiss and never tell!"

Then she would laugh. Rudd was uneasy. It was all unlike his Sarah, so composed and correct.

That evening Mr. and Mrs. Hoadley and Rudd played cards alone. Sarah was out.

"Where's Sarah?" Rudd asked.

Mr. Hoadley grinned at his wife.

"She'll be back soon," said Mr. Hoadley. "Can you give me Leeds, Master Rudd?"

"No, I can't," said Rudd. "Mrs. Hoadley, can you give me Cheltenham?"

At the end of the game Rudd went to the door and slipped out. As he stood there in the dark he heard a smothered laugh and Sarah's voice saying, "Give over!"

Then a man laughed and there was the sound of a kiss and a struggle.

Then Sarah suddenly appeared.

But not his Sarah! Not Sarah self-possessed and

placid and meticulously tidy, but a Sarah excited and wispy and flushed.

What Rudd felt, it is hard to say, but he looked at Sarah with new eyes. A flaw had shown in the marble. Sarah had become ordinary; more than ordinary, disquieting. He could not forget her flushed face.

Mr. Hoadley shut the door, and Sarah went upstairs, and in a few moments she returned composed and herself again save for a heightened colour; but Rudd did not seem to want to be near her. For the first time he was repelled by her. He had seen passion and it was ugly.

From that moment he ceased to consider her his encyclopædia and tutelary genius in one. He did more things for himself and carried many of his questions elsewhere. Sarah had been found wanting: she had betrayed him. No servant has the right to be so human as to change her face.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WAGER

SOME of the happiest hours of Rudd's early life were spent in the Oldshire County Ground at Caston.

Mr. Sergison was a great follower of cricket and he often took Rudd into the Pavilion with him, where they sat among the Oldshire patrons and came very near indeed to the great men of the world—such as Lord Harris and Jack Shuter, W. W. Read and the Hon. Ivo Bligh, the Australian giant, Bonnor, with his fair beard, and—another!

Rudd was never bored, although too young to understand the *finesse* of the game. Not even Scotton or Louis Hall could bore him. It was enough that they were battling on a green field and eleven men were trying to get them out.

Those were the days when you could pick out the professionals and the amateurs by their clothes; and an over had only four balls in it; and no cricketer dreamed of stopping to drink tea; and even W. G. could leave the pavilion without being photographed; and point stood at point; and there were often as

many as four men on the on side; and no professional advertised tonics, because no professional ever took them. None the less, Rudd and the other spectators thought the game as good as it could be.

It was the custom at the Oldshire County Cricket ground—and still is, but under safer conditions—for the amateurs to have a few minutes' practice before the match began, when their ambition seemed to be not so much to defend their wickets against good bowling as to hit indifferent bowling into the empyrean. To hit high and far and often was the thing.

Any boy on the ground who chanced to possess a ball was allowed to bowl, and naturally the most famous batsmen had the greatest number of servitors.

In those days the nets extended only for a yard or so beyond the batsmen, and not, as now, for the length of the pitch, so that as there was a row of half a dozen batsmen at least, all hitting as hard as they possibly could, the position of bowler was fraught with dangers comparable to those of war. Balls whizzed in every direction at about a mile a minute, and many were the accidents. Rudd knew one boy who had lost an eye there.

One morning Rudd was early on the ground, as he liked to be, to await the Gloucestershire men; and on this day he had to be earlier still in order to secure a position at the nets with his ball, because in those brave days Gloucestershire meant W. G. True that other fine players were in the eleven, not

the least of them W. G.'s elder brother, the active and resourceful E. M. so dangerous in the field, and the slender and accomplished G. F., and their cousin W. R. Gilbert; but it was W. G. who drew the crowd. His towering bulk and black beard were the loadstone, and Rudd's mind this morning was filled with the determination (weak and infirm as was his youthful arm) to make one of the Doctor's bowlers—just to be able to say he had done so.

So many bowlers were there that the great man had no time to do more than recover his footing before the next ball came along. This haste and absence of his usual careful preliminaries probably were as much the cause of the terrific thing that happened as any transcendent merit in Rudd's bowling; but be that as it may, Rudd sent down a ball, W. G. stepped out to hit, missed it, and was bowled middle stump.

Rudd glowed all day and might have been seen mysteriously smiling to himself no matter where he was. The fact did not pass into his anecdotal repertory, but the memory of the triumph was magnificently framed and hung on the line in the gallery of his heart.

That, however, was not of the first importance, nor was W. G. for all his glory Rudd's prime hero. His prime hero and the first man to lift the boy to the stature and condition of a man—and sporting man at that—was another. But you shall hear.

It was when Rudd was ten that a match between

the Gentlemen and the Players was played at Caston for the benefit of a great bowler who had just retired, and Rudd was there all three days. It was one of the most remarkable contests on record, because both sides made the same score in the first innings, and the finish was extraordinarily close.

Rudd had seen many matches with exciting moments, but nothing like this, nor in after life did he, much as he frequented Lord's and the Oval, ever see another quite so dramatic.

But it was not merely the excitement that endowed the third day with its red letter, but the distinction which Rudd enjoyed of sitting in the closest intimacy with his ideal cricketer, and being treated not only as an equal but as a gentleman and a gambler.

And who was Rudd's hero?

Rudd's hero was a shortish, very active man, with a tanned cheek, and a small thick moustache, and very white teeth, and a brilliant eye. He usually went in first, with Barlow (a racehorse with a teamster), and he hit very hard, called his partner loudly, ran very short runs, and under no circumstances wore anything on his head.

His name?

His name was A. N. Hornby, and he was captain of Lancashire, and on this occasion captain of the Gentlemen.

Rudd saw most of the counties, but none contained a personality so fascinating to him as this impulsive Lancastrian, the ideal amateur.

The Players batted first, sending in the genial Yorkshire colossus, George Ulyett, and the cautious polished Shrewsbury. But George fell instantly to a wily one from the insidious Mr. Appleby. Then came Barnes of Notts, jovial and reckless, who rattled up thirty-six; and the plodding Selby, who was caught at the wicket by Mr. Tylecote; and then Mr. Hornby's patient associate Barlow, who never got out at all, partly because Mr. Hornby was not with him to run him out, and partly because he took no risks, but made fifty-four in his stone-walling way; and then that winning mirthful Yorkshireman, Willy Bates, who made a light-hearted fifty; and then the greatest character of them all at that day and for long after, Tom Emmett himself, with his huge comic nose, only one remove from Carnival night, and his shambling gait, and a smile as broad as one of his own Ridings.

The last four were Charlwood of Sussex, A. Payne, the wicket-keeper, Alfred Shaw, the Ulysses of bowlers, and his dangerous fast ally, F. Morley; and the whole side made 204, Mr. Appleby accounting for six of them.

The Gentlemen as a whole were less illustrious, but A. G. Steel was among them, and A. H. Trevor, and G. F. Vernon (Trevor's companion in the famous Rickling Green partnership), and especially Mr. Hornby, who made top score with sixty-nine, the whole side being out also for 204.

The Pavilion having buzzed for twenty minutes

with the coincidence, the Players went in again. This time Mr. Steel succeeded in getting Barlow caught; Ulyett made fourteen; and the chief scorers were Selby with forty-six and Bates with twenty-three. The total was a poor 112; and Mr. Steel claimed seven wickets.

The weather was fair, the pitch was good, and 112 seemed a trifling total for a team of high-stepping amateurs to exceed, when the Gentlemen went to the wicket again. But the bowling and fielding turned out to be too good. Alfred Shaw, who had done nothing in the first innings, now began to be difficult; and when Mr. Steel and Mr. Hornby were both out for only thirty-seven between them, and the score was still low, and no remarkable batsmen were left to go in, the situation began to look serious for the amateurs.

Mr. Hornby, on retiring to the Pavilion, hastily removed his pads and came out to the top row to watch. It was packed; not a seat; so, seizing Rudd, he lifted him up, insinuated himself beneath him, and placed him on his knee. Rudd flushed with pride.

"Now," Mr. Hornby said, "who's going to win?"

"The Gentlemen," said Rudd loyally.

"I'm afraid not," said the prince of men. "But let's have a little bet about it, you and I. I'll bet you a penny the players win. Are you on?"

Rudd said he was, and they settled down to witness the last desperate minutes of the struggle.

Mr. Tylecote all too soon placed his leg before a

straight one from Shaw, and had to go back. Mr. M. P. Lucas, after making ten and raising hopes, was caught at the wicket off the same astute bowler.

The score was now 107 for nine wickets. Only six runs needed for victory; but who was to make them? The partisans of the Gentlemen trembled with fear, for the last man was the placid Mr. Appleby, whose batting powers were only rudimentary, yet surely he was good either for six runs himself or to stay there while Mr. Bettesworth got them. But Shaw was bowling like the devil, and there was another ball to the over, too!

The partisans of the Players were flushed and restless. Surely Mr. Appleby could not withstand Shaw's cunning? The very next ball might settle it all.

Meanwhile Mr. Appleby allowed none of the anguish of the moment to accelerate his movements or disturb his serenity, but walked to the wicket with unconcern, and took his middle.

Mr. Hornby groaned. "Keep in, keep in!" he murmured to his last man, who, being three hundred yards away, took no notice. In a tense silence Shaw delivered the last ball of the over, which Mr. Appleby succeeded in snicking for one.

A shout went up. Four to tie, five to win!

Mr. Appleby now had to face Bates, and again Mr. Hornby groaned. "He can't bat," he said, "he can't bat. You've lost your penny."

The fieldsmen seemed to be a week changing their

places; but at last Mr. Appleby had secured his middle, and Bates began to run. Not a sound in the place! No one even breathed. The ball was delivered; Mr. Appleby played at it and missed it, and it missed the stumps by the varnish, as they say. The wicket-keeper, Payne, flung up his hands to mark the miracle. Bates took the ball again and again bowled, and this time Mr. Appleby got it away for two, amid terrific cheers. Two to tie, three to win!

The next ball he snicked luckily for one. More cheers. One to tie, two to win! The excitement was too terrible. Men's hearts left their assigned quarters and climbed up into throats and even mouths. Total strangers gripped their neighbours' arms and legs with the force of a vice. Even Mr. Hornby, seasoned as he was to the game's vicissitudes and emotions, breathed in short gasps.

Mr. Bettesworth had now to play. Every eye was on him. The Gentlemen's faction thought, If only he can get one and collar the over we are saved! The Players' sympathizers thought, Please Heaven he's either bowled or makes nothing! For Mr. Bettesworth was more to be trusted against Shaw than Mr. Appleby was.

Amid another dead stillness Bates delivered the last ball of the over, and Mr. Bettesworth played it carefully.

A huge sigh swept the Pavilion. Respite at any rate.

The fieldsmen again changed places with cynical deliberateness, and again Mr. Appleby prepared to bat. Everything depended upon the next moment.

Afred Shaw, fondling the ball, looked thoughtfully down his long shrewd nose. Then he altered the field a little. He was laying a trap.

"Now, Arthur, you must look out," muttered Mr. Hornby despairingly.

One to tie, two to win!

Mr. Appleby glanced carelessly to the Pavilion. If anyone could carry the thing through by sheer want of nerves it was he.

Shaw now was ready. He took his little run, moved his arm with its beautiful easy rhythm, and delivered a ball which apparently had no other purpose than to be hit for six. Mr. Appleby made to hit it, realized that it was shorter than he thought, and sweetly and simply put it back into Shaw's hands.

The match was over; the Players had won by one run! . . .

In the scene of confusion which followed, Mr. Hornby disappeared and Rudd was lost among big men shouting and clapping. . . .

Gradually the ground emptied. But Rudd could not go yet, for he had lost a bet, and must settle it. His only penny was held tightly in a hot hand as he watched the door by which the Gentlemen came out. One by one they emerged, and at last came his hero, carrying his cricket bag and accompanied by three

or four others, all talking and laughing. For the first time Rudd saw him wearing a hat.

Many a boy would have gone up to him and said, "Here's your penny," but Rudd could not break into the conversation. He must keep close and wait for his chance. They all walked slowly down to the gate where the cabs waited, Rudd at their heels. There they got into a cab.

Rudd stood by, looking earnestly at the great man and hoping for a glance of recognition, but it never came; and off went the cab.

Amid so much excitement how could a captain of Gentlemen remember a penny? Rudd realized that: but how he would have liked to pay!

It was not only the first bet he ever made, but the only bet he ever made to a forgetful winner.

CHAPTER IX

ASTRONOMY

RUDD had been taken to the Town Hall to a lecture on Astronomy.

The lecturer was a tall white-bearded man in evening dress. His voice was hard and dreary, but he stated astonishing facts with such conciseness that one could not help listening.

He pained Rudd early in the evening by the contempt which he seemed to have for the earth. He always called it "our little globe." Why little? Rudd wondered. Was it not the whole world? It had been so till this evening, but it was the whole world no longer. It was now steadily becoming an atom in a vast and unimaginable solar system.

The lecturer threw on the screen a picture of the bleak white caverns of the moon. The moon, he said, once no doubt was populous and busy as this little globe of ours. It was now dead. Some day our little globe would lose its heat and be dead too. Rudd shivered and trembled. How soon? how soon? he wondered in fear.

The lecturer made astounding statements about the

distance of one star from another and the centuries that it would take the fastest train, or even bullet, to make a journey. He asked the audience to realize the rapidity with which pain travelled, and then said that if a baby had an arm long enough to touch the sun, and touched it, he would be an old man of more than a hundred before he knew that he had been burnt.

Rudd, all perplexity and dread anxiety, was lost in immensities of time and space. He saw stars going on for ever and ever, farther and farther away, so far that he was dizzy, all owing allegiance to the sun. Why should it be the sun? Why was it not the earth? Surely this was the proper seat of authority—where the Queen was, and the Houses of Parliament, and parents, and policemen, and lecturers?

The lecturer said that the stars existed by millions, and many were gigantically larger than this little globe of ours. Our little globe was as invisible to millions of bigger globes as they were to us. The nebulous mass of powdery light which we, in our poor intelligence, could liken only to fluid from the cow, calling it the Milky Way, was really composed of immense stars too!

Of course we did not know for certain, said the lecturer, but it was reasonable to assume that countless other celestial orbs were inhabited. It was unreasonable to suppose that our little globe possessed the only living creatures in the universe. As to how they were inhabited, no one could say; whether there

were men and women like ourselves, and animals like our horses and dogs, or some wholly different form of life. Possibly also life elsewhere was at once more wonderful and much longer: the paltry three score years and ten vouchsafed to us might elsewhere be enormously surpassed. It was unlikely that civilization had progressed on parallel lines with ours; unlikely that they had books and papers and cricket matches and so forth; but we must remember that even we, with all our boasted cleverness, had known of printing only for a very few generations. We were still in our infancy.

In our infancy! How small it made Rudd feel! How trumpery everything became! He seemed to be shrivelling. And those sparrows of his mother's again troubled him. The question, How would God really have time to notice the death of English sparrows with all this other work on hand? beat at his little brain.

Somehow he came to think of the lecturer and God as one. God also had a white beard. God also would alarm an audience. Rudd was frightened to the core.

Long after this he used to lie awake trying to fathom space: projecting his thoughts beyond the ultimate star to—what? A choking sense of black nothingness was his only reward. "No more nothing, no more nothing," he would murmur in terror.

CHAPTER X

THE BLACK CAT

RUDD, like most children, had been brought up to believe in the profound amiability of the animal kingdom, at any rate in England. That spiders entrap flies, he was aware; but this weakness was palliated by the fact, gathered from Eliza Cook's ballad, that on one occasion at any rate a spider had heartened a king, while Sarah had demonstrated the value of a spider's web to staunch the blood from a small boy's cut finger. For the rest, he thanked the pretty cow that made pleasant milk to soak his bread, and loved little pussy because her coat was so warm, and generally believed as the young are taught to. That Nature is red in tooth and claw he had to learn for himself.

And then came a Sunday morning in high summer when Rudd was sitting with a story-book under the hedge of one of Mr. Hoadley's meadows. He had been let off church, and was gloriously lost in the adventures of Humphrey in *The Children of the New Forest.*

Suddenly he was conscious of shrill cries and

squeaks, and looking up he saw the farmer's black cat being attacked by two birds. In its mouth was something that struggled and cried—a young partridge. Other young partridges moved about behind their distressed and angry parents.

The cat steadily backed away from its assailants and disappeared into the ditch, from which came piteous little noises which gradually ceased. The young partridge was being devoured.

Rudd watched the old birds, fascinated. They were so brave and so perplexed, their little brains seeming to be capable only of appreciating the outrage without planning escape.

Humphrey's purchase of gunpowder and shot and provisions at Lymington was nothing compared with this actual drama.

After a few minutes the cat emerged again from the ditch and very stealthily approached the birds once more. It crept along, almost on its stomach, but with a waving tail. It was terrible.

The old birds, who ought to have been employing all the time during which the cat was busy eating in stampeding to a distant spot, ran towards it with open beaks and long necks. They did not actually touch the cat, nor did the cat dare to touch them; but they conquered. For a while the cat paused irresolute, and then it slowly retreated, stopped to think, and at last walked off in the opposite direction, towards the place where Rudd was sitting; while the partridges, gathering their brood about

them and stationing themselves one at each end of it, began to consider the advisability of moving farther from danger—that is, if a covey of young things like that can ever be really out of danger with so many predatory creatures around them. The wonder is that any are left for the gun at all.

The cat came slowly along the hedge towards Rudd, and all the birds in the branches above uttered cries of warning. One bird did more: it flew round and round only a yard or so out of reach chirping loudly. Why it should so be courting peril Rudd could not think; but suddenly he learned only too well, for from the grass two tiny wings fluttered up. The cat gave a spring and another victim was in its jaws. All unexpected too—what a red letter Sunday morning for it!

Then Rudd realized that this little bird had but just left the nest, and was learning to fly. A favourite nursery poem—

> "Birdie, stay a little longer,
> Till the little wings are stronger,"—

came to his mind. That had always seemed to him pathetic, but never so much as now. He sprang up and flung *The Children of the New Forest* at the cat, but though frightened it did not drop its prey, but leaping over the tufts of grass, now and then pausing to look back at Rudd with hateful yellow eyes, it disappeared.

The beautiful June morning became grey. There was no sound save the piteous bewildered notes of the mother bird, the church bells ringing noisily, and the sobs of a small boy.

Rudd did much thinking for the rest of that morning, and Captain Marryatt had no further chance with him. At lunch he astonished Sarah and nearly choked Mr. Hoadley by asking if he might be excused from eating any roast beef and have only Yorkshire pudding and potatoes, and going on to explain, in reply to a torrent of questions, that he was not ill, but he wanted in future to be a vegetarian.

"That's a good 'un," said Mr. Hoadley. "Why, your teeth will all drop out."

"Why?" Rudd asked in alarm.

"Because it's only biting good meat that keeps them in," said the farmer. "That's what they're for—meat. If we were meant to eat nothing but vegetables we should have been given only gums."

Rudd looked inquiringly at Sarah. Was that so?

Sarah confirmed every word of it. "But why do you want to be a vegetarian?" she asked.

"Eating animals is so cruel," Rudd said.

"Then of course you won't be going with me to market to-morrow," remarked Mr. Hoadley.

"Me not going?" Rudd answered with surprise and misgiving.

"How could you bring yourself to take part in selling beasts for folks to eat?" was the Socratic reply.

Rudd felt that he was up against more complexity than the situation had seemed capable of holding, and he consented to eat a slice of beef after all.

But nothing would induce him to stroke the black cat again.

CHAPTER XI

UNCLE BEN'S PHRASE

IT is not only perfumes, such as that of lilac, and wallflowers, and lilies of the valley, and wild thyme on the hot hills, and rubbish fires: it is not only sights, such as sunsets and foreign market-places, that abide in the memory, unexpectedly and poignantly to revivify the past. It is often sentences too; but whereas sights and scents are retrospective, a sentence can construct and reconcile. No one that Rudd knew used so many of these memorable phrases as Uncle Ben, but one in particular established itself in the boy's brain.

Uncle Ben was spending a night at the Sergisons' when Rudd was ten or eleven.

Uncle Ben was his especial idol, not only because he was keen and sympathetic and full of fun, which Mr. Sergison had never been, but because he alone talked to Rudd as if Rudd was not a child. Rudd was so tired of the grown-ups who descended to him: who called him Little Man, and wished to be taken to the drawing-room door to see by the record kept on the edge of it how much he had grown since they

were there last: who asked what he collected, and submitted problems about a herring and a half.

They were kind, he knew, and they brought chocolates and sixpences; but they carried things no further. Also they had no memories. They said the same thing every time, as if the year had done as little for him as for themselves.

Uncle Ben was not like this. When Uncle Ben talked to Rudd he made no difference in his voice or his words. Sometimes he even said "damn," but he said it so rightly, as if it were the only word, and with such rich heartiness, that even if he had not been Mrs. Sergison's favourite brother, she would hardly have protested.

It is true that when she went up to say good-night to Rudd and give him those last kisses, she sometimes warned him that he must not think that because Uncle Ben could use such words, Rudd had a right to also. But Rudd knew that he hadn't.

Uncle Ben always brought Rudd a present; but it was not like those others. It was something that he would appreciate a little now, and grow to appreciate much more, instead of growing out of. It was Uncle Ben who gave him *Pickwick* when he was six, and *David Copperfield* when he was seven, and *Thomas Edwards, the Scotch Naturalist,* when he was eight, and *The Ingoldsby Legends* when he was nine, and *The Three Musketeers* when he was ten.

Uncle Ben also gave him his star map, which by some movable contrivance told him what stars were

to be seen every night in the year, and his map measurer, and his great box of pastels.

Uncle Ben gave him also little pictures for his room—not the coloured soap pictures, or puppies and kittens from Christmas numbers, but beautiful faces after drawings by Leonardo and Raphael, and Dürer's "White Horse," and "St. Jerome," and even the "Melancholia," and Uncle Ben's own favourite Charles Keenes cut from old *Punches* to be pasted on a screen by Rudd himself.

Uncle Ben brought more life into the house on his infrequent and very brief visits than crept in during the whole year. For he could play on the piano anything that he had heard, and the only fault that Rudd had to find with him was that after sitting down to tell them what the latest comic song in London was like, he would succumb to the opportunity of making melody of his own, and pass off into melancholy improvisations, and so for far too long be lost to any outside influence. Uncle Ben's improvisations not only had no interest for Rudd, but were simply robbing them all of the precious time in which he might be relating, with infinite spirit and monstrous exaggeration, some of his new adventures; for Uncle Ben had adventures as other persons have disappointments.

Rudd's greatest joy of all was to walk out alone with this magical uncle. They always went first to an ancient part of the town known as the Alleys, where the old curiosity dealers congregated, and here

they would first examine the windows, and Uncle Ben would explain what everything was and where it probably came from, and then they would go in, and although he almost never bought anything, in a few moments he and the dealer became as brothers.

And all the time they were walking, Uncle Ben would be unfolding his busy impressionistic mind to Rudd exactly as to a friend of long standing: drawing his attention to a girl's prettiness, or the rich colours of a fruiterer's window, or the still pearl-grey of the sea, or a man-of-war on the horizon, or an especially good horse. He seemed to see everything, and always to find something which communicated a pleasure which he in his turn must communicate to another. That, perhaps, was Uncle Ben's most remarkable quality: the desire to share whatever he enjoyed.

On this particular visit Uncle Ben had been telling a story of an employee who had robbed him. For some time there had been leakages of money; every one had been questioned, but to no effect; and then at last presumptive evidence had been forthcoming, and the culprit had absconded.

Uncle Ben went at once to the man's house and found his wife and family. They were in great distress, for the wife had had a serious operation and a long illness, and all the money was gone. The thefts, of which she had known nothing, had been to keep the home together. Then the wretched father, leaving the last contribution and a confession behind him, had disappeared.

"But why didn't he come to me?" Uncle Ben had said.

"Ah, if he only had!" replied the wretched wife.

"We must get him back," said Uncle Ben. "Nobody need know the worst."

Then followed an amusing account of their efforts to trace him: advertisements in the papers, so wrapped up, for fear of giving too much away to the outer world, as to be unintelligible even to the runaway himself; a private detective, and all the trouble that it was to make him understand that the husband when found must never suspect that he was required by the law; the suppression of the real facts of the case at the office; and so forth.

And at last came the discovery of the man, in a false beard, close to his own house, having haunted the neighbourhood to waylay his children and discover how their mother was.

In the end Uncle Ben had taken him back.

"Very humane of you, I'm sure," said Mr. Sergison, "but very unwise."

"Not at all, my dear Tom," said Uncle Ben; "very astute of me, as a matter of fact, because if there is one man in my employ who, I know for an absolute certainty, will never either rob me or do anything but guard my interests, it is this one. Many a man," he added, "has to go wrong before he can go right."

CHAPTER XII

MR. DIMSDALE

RUDD had been at his first boarding-school only a few weeks when one of the masters, Mr. Dimsdale, succumbed to pneumonia.

Every one knew that Mr. Dimsdale was ill, but it came as a shock to hear that he had died in the night. The blinds were pulled down; breakfast was eaten by gaslight and almost in silence; there were no games that day. Now and then a boy would forget, and would shout or laugh, and then suddenly he would remember and freeze into quietude again. The classes were subdued also, and the masters wore black ties.

Then, the next day, the whole school was assembled, and the head master informed them that he wished them all to take a last look at their late friend.

They must not, he said, be frightened. There was nothing about death that was frightening; it was merely a phase: Mr. Dimsdale had passed on, that was all. To what life he had passed, no one knew: none had returned from the grave to tell; but he,

the speaker, for one, was confident that it was to a finer and more beautiful existence.

He now proposed, he said, to lead the boys, in small companies, through the death chamber.

There was a rustle of alarm when he had finished. Such a proceeding was by no means to every one's mind. They were sorry for Mr. Dimsdale, who had been sympathetic and sporting; but to have to see his dead body . . . ! Vaguely they felt that this was not in the curriculum, and one boy openly remarked, when the first party had left, that he was sure his pater would be jolly stuffy about it—a statement which led to a series of similar avowals, with mater here and there substituted as the jolly stuffy one.

Still, the head master was not to be denied, except by two or three smaller boys, who at once began to cry bitterly and were led away. Rudd envied them, but was unable to emulate. Not that he was not afraid, but his fear of public disgrace, should he thus break down, was greater. It is often the real heroes who run away, but how was he, at his age, to know that?

After a few minutes' absence the first party returned, very depressed in deportment, and some with red eyes. To every one's dismay, Ebbets, the captain of the eleven and a giant of a boy, was openly sobbing, his efforts to disguise his emotion leading to gasping gurgles that did anything but reassure the others. The result was that a few more fell out and were excused; but still not the cowardly Rudd.

At last came his turn to visit the room. They all walked in silence to the dreadful door, and there the silence became almost tangible.

Mr. Dimsdale was in his coffin; terribly still and waxen. He was dressed in a night-shirt, and his hands were placed across his chest. He had been a clean-shaved man, but was now stubbly. His eyes were closed. Had they been open Rudd would have bolted. He felt sure of that.

When all the boys were in the room the head master made a few remarks about the beauty of death. How purifying it was, how serene. He lifted up one of Mr. Dimsdale's hands for them to see its delicacy and whiteness. He held a candle behind it to illustrate its transparency.

"You see," he said finally, "there's nothing to be afraid of."

But Rudd knew better. There was everything to be afraid of, because it was death, and death was the negation of life. Death was horrible. First, ceasing to be; then, this cold marble state; and then, the coffin, and the hammering of the nails, and the lowering into the dark earth. And then . . .

Had Rudd not seen Mr. Dimsdale's actual lifeless body, the funeral, a day or so after, would have been little more than a piece of gloomy ritual; but as it was, it was the definitive burial beneath the ground of a white, fixed stubbly face and semi-transparent hands.

Every time Rudd walked by the cemetery, which was near the school, after this, he saw Mr. Dimsdale

lying face upwards in his coffin under the earth. For months he dreamed of him; for months he passed the door of the bedroom at a run.

Mr. Dimsdale thereafter fixed the type of all corpses. Mr. Dimsdale lay in every passing hearse. Rudd had but to hear that some one was dead, and Mr. Dimsdale's inflexible lines sprang to mind. One day he too would lie like that.

CHAPTER XIII

LIES: BASE AND SPLENDID

THERE was a boy at Rudd's school named Keast. He was rather stupid and slow; very plain, with that kind of red coarse plainness which never grows into attractiveness; untidy, grubby. Hence, although he had fine true eyes (a feature, however, of which schoolboys know nothing), he became a butt, and Rudd, who could be an ingenious tease, never hesitated to pull his leg and get a rise out of him. Being very good-natured, Keast took this all in good part: disappointingly so, in fact. It was Rudd who had called him Gargoyle, a name which gave great delight to those of his schoolfellows who knew enough about architecture.

Mr. Pollitt, the mathematical master, had a special form of imposition for boys who misbehaved. Instead of lines, he set them sums which had not only to be done within the time allotted—usually a half-holiday—but had also to be correct. In order that they should be correct, Mr. Pollitt (whom the boys naturally called Jumbo, for this was at a time in England's history when anyone who was fat, or indeed anyone

who was merely plumper than his neighbours, automatically acquired that nickname)—Mr. Pollitt had instituted a system peculiar to himself. Each boy with an imposition had to find another boy to check it before it was brought up.

This may be thought an unfair plan, since it involved as the associate of a guilty boy an innocent one, but there was some sense in it, too, for the difficulty of finding a free-born Briton, conscious of rectitude, to give up his time to one who had really deserved punishment, not only was considerable, but it conferred a distasteful unpopularity on the searcher: one of the reasons being that if, after this outside corroboration, there should happen to be an error in the sum or problem (or rather, if Jumbo detected it, for often enough he merely glanced at it and justice was satisfied), the virtuous ally was punished as severely as though he had been the original sinner. Thus did Jumbo strive for the efficiency of his pupils both in season and out; for the knowledge of the risks, and the natural dislike of a boy to get another boy into trouble, all worked towards zeal and mathematical righteousness.

It happened, however, that with the arrival of the homely and otherwise clumsy and inept Keast much of this improvement vanished, for Keast was a first-class arithmetician, and he was so amenable to any malefactor's beck and call that at the time of Rudd's entry into the class impositions had become common again.

So much explanation is necessary to make clear that which follows.

Rudd had been mathematically remiss, and was set a punitive task. This he postponed doing till the last minute, as it presented few difficulties; and he then dashed it off and took it straight to Jumbo without thinking it necessary to seek the usual ratification. It was too simple for a mistake to have crept in, and Rudd knew himself to be no fool.

Jumbo glanced at the paper, and was handing it back, when a figure seemed to strike him. He examined it carefully, and Rudd changed feet.

"I thought you all understood that these sums must be checked before I see them?" he said.

"Yes," said Rudd as boldly as he could.

"Then why didn't you get some one to check this?" Jumbo, who seemed to be in a bad temper, glared sternly.

What was Rudd to do? He was not normally dishonest nor out of the way cowardly, but it was absurd to let the man think he had omitted such a necessary precaution as that.

He temporized. "Surely it's not wrong, sir?" he said.

"It is wrong," Mr. Pollitt replied. "I want to know why? Didn't you have it checked?"

Here was Rudd's chance; but he missed it.

"Yes, sir," he said.

"Who checked it?"

"Keast, sir," said Rudd, on an inspiration; and in-

stantly he saw the necessity of intercepting old Gargoyle as quickly as possible and squaring him.

"Keast?" Mr. Pollitt asked in surprise.

"Yes," Rudd replied, adding as a brilliant afterthought, in palliation of Keast's defective work as a supervisor, "but he had to do it against time. I didn't ask him till just as the bell rang."

"Rayner," said Mr. Pollitt, talking to another boy, "go and find Keast and bring him to me at once. You stay here," he said to Rudd, and resumed the book he was reading.

Rudd felt the perspiration working out all over him. His knees shook. His heart beat 500 to the minute. His blood turned cold. He stood at the desk in an agony. What an infernal ass he had been! What an insanely silly lie to have told, and—more—be found out over! How could he have been so idiotic; and the worst of it was that he couldn't confess now, it would make it all too gratuitous.

What would Jumbo say if he did? Rudd wondered. Jumbo had never been very keen about him, but he would be fearfully surprised to find him such a sneaking little beast as this. It would spoil everything afterwards. No more fun. A lie to save oneself was all right, comparatively, but a lie involving another chap—that was too low.

It was such a jolly day too, and he was looking forward to the half-holiday and a long walk, and then this rotten thing happened without any warning.

Jumbo did not look up. He read steadily.

And what about Gargoyle? Rudd wondered. Would he play the game and back up Rudd's lie? It was asking an awful lot of a chap, especially one whom Rudd himself had nicknamed after his ugliness and baited so often. Keast was a decent fellow, but why should he sacrifice himself for Rudd? Besides, he might be too unprepared to lie properly. It all depended on two things: one being how much Rayner had told him, and the other the form of Jumbo's first question to him on his arrival. Rudd was very doubtful if Rayner had heard enough to explain the situation rightly. Rayner was one of those silly asses who never notice what's going on.

Jumbo never lifted his eyes from his book.

Then a terrible chilling possibility occurred to Rudd. Suppose Keast did not understand the situation, or did not play the game, and denied it, would Rudd go on affirming it? His heart now stood absolutely still for a moment. Could he be so vile as to do that? Could he? How true it was, as some one has said, that the bother of lying is that one lie leads to another! Was ever anyone in such a ghastly mess?

Jumbo went on reading.

Rudd heard nothing but the pulse in his throat. Now and then shouts came in at the window from the playground, to accentuate his misery. No more of that happiness for him; his life was poisoned.

At last there was a scamper on the stairs, and Rudd prepared for the worst.

But it was Rayner alone. Rudd breathed again.

"Please, sir," Rayner said, "I can't find Keast anywhere. Dawson thinks he went into the town for Mr. Ramsay."

Rudd returned to real life again. The axe was lifted from his neck.

"Very well," said Mr. Pollitt to Rayner. "See that Keast comes to me directly he returns. You may go," he added to Rudd.

Rudd's wish was to leave the room like lightning; but he mustered enough duplicity to visit his desk first with a laggard step.

Once outside the door he flew. At any cost he must get hold of Keast before anyone else did. He made certain that Keast had gone to the town, and then he waited by the gate in an agony. Never had he undergone such torture. He knew for the first time what it was to despise himself. If only this lie could be hidden he would never lie again. It wasn't the punishment that he feared now, it was the loss of his good name.

Suddenly he saw Keast sauntering back. Keast grinned as he recognized Rudd at the gate.

"Not waiting for me?" he asked half anxiously, for any attention to him usually preceded some joke or mischief.

"Yes," said Rudd, "I've been waiting for you for ages. It's frightfully important."

Keast looked astonishment. "No larks?" he said.

"No," said Rudd. "It's a matter of life or death for me and no one can help me but you."

Upon Keast's twisted features perplexity was written.

"No larks?" he said again.

"I swear," said Rudd. "Look here," and he drew him behind the wall—"I've done a beastly mean thing, and you are the only soul who can help me out. That's if you will. I had an imposition from Jumbo and I didn't get it checked. It looked all right, you see. Very well: it was wrong; there was some rotten mistake in it; and when he asked me who checked it, I said—I said—well, I said you."

Rudd searched Keast's face. Keast said nothing.

"It was absolutely rotten of me, I know," said Rudd, "but I was taken all by surprise and never properly thought."

Keast said nothing.

"Will you back me up?" Rudd asked after a few moments' silence.

Rudd never forgot this scene. He could reconstruct it in the small hours of the night ever afterwards and feel again the shame of it and the suspense.

Keast did not answer at once. He was looking at Rudd with astonishment; studying him like a naturalist.

"*You* did that?" he said at last.

"It was rotten, vile," Rudd said; "I know that. But I lost my head. Just tell me if you'll back me up?" he asked again imploringly. "I made it a little bit easy for you. I said I didn't give you enough time

to be thorough because the bell rang just as I took it to you."

"You do think of things!" Keast said.

Rudd groaned. "It's awful," he said. "I didn't know I was as bad as that. Will you? will you? Just say, and I'll know what to do, because I'm going to get it over one way or the other."

Keast fumbled with his hands. "I hate lying," he said. "I promised—— I hate lying, anyway."

"I'm sorry I asked you," Rudd said. "I see. I'll go and tell Jumbo the whole rotten truth."

"Wait a minute," said Keast. "I hate lying, and I didn't want ever to do any. But . . . Oh, look here, that'll be all right. Don't you worry. Of course I'll stand by you."

"I don't know why you should," Rudd said simply.

"As for that," said Keast—"Oh, let's get it over!"

At that moment Rayner appeared. "Hullo, Gargoyle!" he said. (Rudd winced.) "I've been hunting for you everywhere. Jumbo wants you. I don't know what for, but he's in a stew anyway."

"Now?" Keast asked.

"Yes," said Rayner. "I've got to lead you to him."

"I'll come, too," said Rudd.

They filed off in silence.

"Oh, here you are," said Mr. Pollitt. "Is it true, Keast, that you checked these sums?"

Rudd had another bad moment, but as a matter of fact he had lost interest in his escape. It was Keast of whom he was thinking now—the difference be-

tween this despised creature and himself with his superior airs.

"Yes," said Keast.

"But what on earth's the matter with you?" Mr. Pollitt asked. "How could you let such a bloomer as this pass?"

"I suppose I was a bit slack about it," said Keast.

"I'm afraid you must pay for that slackness," said Mr. Pollitt, and named a task. "By rights Sergison ought to do another too, since he got this one wrong, but logically the fault was yours, so he may consider himself free."

"I'd like to do another," said Rudd.

"There'll be plenty of opportunity later, I fear," said Jumbo. "Now you can go."

Rudd had expected to feel as if a mountain had rolled from his back, but instead he was conscious of a bigger one. He knew himself to be a cad—and more than that, a cad who had masqueraded as a gentleman and was now in the presence of a gentleman whom he had been wont to treat with contempt.

It was in Rudd's mind to tell Keast he was sorry about his past teasing, and to promise amendment for the future, and he even had his fingers on his chief possession, a silver fountain pen, as a gift to him, but his tongue refused to help. None of these things seemed to be quite decent.

At last he said, "Keast, you're a brick."

"It's all right," said Keast. "Let's forget it."

But Rudd never did.

CHAPTER XIV

SHOWING HOW ONE WHO SHOULD MUCH LONGER HAVE RETAINED HIS DIVINITY LOST IT

RUDD and his father had maintained easy relations, without idolizing on the boy's part or any rapture of affection on the man's. Rudd took it for granted that his father was above criticism. He had never set him either on a pinnacle or beneath the microscope; he was his father, the head of the house, the dictator, the payer of rent, the provider of insufficient pocket-money.

When other boys framed indictments of their governors (as some boys will) Rudd listened with surprise and turned away in distaste. But equally when other boys bragged about their governors (also occasionally a boyish habit),—their position, power, prowess or generosity,—Rudd took little interest. He had no particular fault to find with Mr. Sergison and no particular praise for him. Just as abuse of one's pater offended him, so did exaltation of one's pater seem a bit of a howler.

Rudd had never asked himself how much affection he felt for his father. His mother he could love ach-

ingly: after hurting or disappointing her by some thoughtlessness or misdemeanour, he had sobbed and suffered secretly for hours, and again, retrospectively, on returning to school. But his feelings for his father he took for granted. He was filial.

When Mr. Sergison had complained of the toughness of the beef (as he often did, having an incurable aversion from the dentist), and had even left the dinner-table as a protest, Rudd had merely assumed that that was as it should be; that it was all in the paternal part. Fathers have the right to kick up a row. It is possibly even their duty to lose their tempers: just as it is the duty of mothers to keep theirs and smilingly accept a responsibility which belonged, as a stricter logician than Mr. Sergison would think, to the ox, the butcher, the cook, or to God. That was Rudd's inarticulate view of the matter.

And as a matter of fact there was not much trouble in the Sergison household. Things went fairly smoothly: Mr. Sergison was never contradicted except by a visitor or guest, and gradually the visitors and guests who came to the house had been subjected to so thorough a process of selection (as in so many other houses) that the contradictors had all been weeded out and Sir Oracle barked without demur. By carefully choosing one's company one can easily be the best man in it; and this Mr. Sergison subconsciously knew. His wife's brothers, Rudd's uncles, were the only real danger; but they came seldom, or

only when they heard from their sister that her husband was away.

Not that Mr. Sergison was much of a bully or a dogmatist. But he liked his own way, and having made his fortune unaided, and retired, he thought he had earned the right to get it. Mrs. Sergison and Rudd tacitly agreed.

Mr. Sergison was a short, florid, well-dressed man with a fierce moustache. He talked well and laughed loudly. He was heartiest when people were leaving.

The most surprising thing about him was that he was a Liberal. Asked to what party he belonged, nineteen out of every twenty strangers, looking at him, would have said Tory. But he was a very keen Liberal indeed. Not that his politics were ever statesmanship; he was not constructive, and if it had not been for the *Daily News'* leading articles he would often have had little enough to say. His politics, in short, were at bottom not politics at all, but partisanship, prejudice. A devout and incorrigibly loyal hero-worshipper, he had come early under the spell of a great Liberal and had never wavered.

Mr. Sergison got up late, read the papers very thoroughly, purring over the *Daily News* and snarling over the *Times;* spent much time actively in the garden, from which he extracted periodical attacks of lumbago; visited his club after lunch; returned for tea and such letter-writing as he did; and read books of travel at night after dinner. He interested himself in local affairs to some extent, and was on various

committees. Now and then he took the chair at a meeting, being quite a fair speaker; now and then he entertained a Liberal orator; now and then he and Mrs. Sergison dined out or gave a modest dinner-party.

With Rudd Mr. Sergison was patronizing and bland, with a tincture of irony. Rudd did not irritate him, as some boys do their fathers; and his manner did not offend Rudd, who knew no other. As I say, their relations were easy, but neither made any effort to cultivate the other. Mr. Sergison had never really wanted the thrill of paternity, nor had he experienced it. Rudd shared none of his father's tastes, while gardening, in particular, he detested.

Having selected a school for Rudd, travelled with him to it on his first term, and handed him half a crown, Mr. Sergison considered that he might honestly take several years off duty as an active parent. The rest was between the school-master and Mrs. Sergison.

It was towards the middle of the term when a letter from Mrs. Sergison to Rudd contained terrific news: "I am rather sorry to have to tell you," she wrote, "that father has been persuaded to stand for Parliament at the by-election following on the death of Mr. Rushton. He is, of course, highly excited about it," she went on, "and I see very little of him just now. I wish he had not consented, for if he gets in he will find the work of Parliament very vexatious and wear-

ing, while if he is defeated he will be embittered, I fear, and will regret the expense."

Rudd promptly replied to the great news.

"Dear Father,—I am very glad you are going into Parliament. Please let me come home for the election. I should fearfully like to see one, and I might be able to help. Pascoe, one of the boys here, whose father is member for Tryfleet, says that he was out all day in a carriage bringing voters to the poll. He says he would come and help us, if you liked, although his father's a Conservative. He says he has no bitter feelings that would prevent his experience being at your disposal. Anyway I hope you will let me come home for a day or two. Please arrange it with Mr. Stokes.—Your loving son,

"R. S."

Rudd's chances of getting his way were seriously jeopardized by the addition of the letters M.P. to his father's name on the address, but he succeeded, although no invitation to the energetic and magnanimous Pascoe was included.

Mr. Stokes called him to his room and said that in response to Mr. Sergison's desire he might go home for two nights. "I could wish," he added, "that your father's politics were of another colour, but since it is of importance that men of weight and high motives should from time to time leaven the Liberal ranks you can give him my cordial wishes for his success."

Pascoe accompanied Rudd to the station and gave him some last words of counsel. "Don't forget," he said, "that your governor must kiss some babies, like the man in *Pickwick*, you know. Mine kissed lots. And if he doesn't kiss them he must say he never saw a kid half so fine in all his puff. He must shake hands, too, with every one. Just bowing is no good at all. It's a great pity I'm not going to be there. I could put him up to such lots of things."

Rudd's cab had not proceeded twenty yards into Caston before a poster came in sight with "VOTE FOR SERGISON" on it in huge letters. It was Rudd's first experience of publicity, and it gave him an odd chilly feeling. This Sergison, whose claims to be supported had to be blazoned forth on vulgar hoardings among music-hall and theatre advertisements and pictures, was his father! Something sacred in his home life detached itself and fell away.

And then came a ruder shock, for on the next poster was Mr. Sergison's portrait, as though he was a conjurer (no such luck!) or pianist. It was larger than life and much coarser, and underneath it were the words, "VOTE FOR SERGISON, THE MAN FOR CASTON."

How could he allow it? Rudd wondered what his mother thought of it?

"What are Mr. Sergison's chances?" he asked the cabman.

"Not very good," he said: "he's the wrong colour, I'm thinking. They're getting to be a very Tory lot here."

"But the last member was Liberal, wasn't he?" Rudd asked.

"Yes, he was," said the driver; "but he was very popular, you know, and he had done so much for the place. Things have changed, too, since he got in last."

It was the day preceding the poll, and each candidate was to have a final meeting that night. Meanwhile they were making last desperate efforts to influence voters; answering questions everywhere; paying hurried calls at the various committee rooms; while each was bent upon making one final attack on the employees at the great factory on the edge of the town, who were numerous enough to settle the result if they could be won over.

Suddenly and with a kind of shock Rudd caught a glimpse of his father in the street, and was astonished to see into what a perfect candidate his tailor had transformed him. Resplendent in frock-coat, white waistcoat, white spats and tall hat, he was talking with a radiating amiability, infrequent at home, to a dirty navvy. The suggestion of deference in his father's attitude stuck in Rudd's memory for years after.

The house was in a muddle, the effect of excitement and guests, and Rudd found his mother nervous and restless. Gentlemen from London were staying there for the night's meeting, among them a real lord. That is to say, a real lord by title, but in reality a younger son, a House of Commons lord; real enough, however, to upset an ordinary Englishman's castle, as it is the nobility's privilege to do. In order that the lord might

have a dressing-room, Rudd must sleep on a sofa in the drawing-room: an unnecessary precaution, as it happened, for he was a casual fellow, who didn't even go to the bath-room, and the condition of his hair-brushes was the talk of the kitchen for months after.

Mrs. Sergison looked tired and unhappy, but Rudd's presence cheered her.

"Will he get in?" Rudd asked.

"I don't think so," she said. "I'm afraid he hasn't done enough for the town, and the tide's against the Liberals just now, I am told. For myself, I hope he won't, for it will mean moving to London and every kind of upset, and I am certain that he will soon hate it, even if it doesn't make him ill. He's too impatient for the House of Commons."

Dinner was to be at half-past six sharp, on account of the great meeting, and Rudd, for the first time in his life, saw a row of champagne bottles in his father's house. Not that Mr. Sergison was a teetotaller; but hitherto sherry, claret and port had represented the utmost he had attempted for state occasions, and claret alone for ordinary domestic conviviality. It seemed, Mrs. Sergison explained to Rudd, that legislators expect champagne.

"May I open one now?" he asked, with his eyes big as they rested on the golden-wired corks; but it was generally agreed that to open champagne some hours before it was needed might be a mistake. The cook was certain of it; the others thought it probable.

After lunch with his mother, Rudd hurried to the

town to see the fun. He found the familiar streets wearing a totally new air. Placards were everywhere, stationary and being carried by sandwich men, each defeating the other, for no one soul would vote for both candidates. To have his name so exploited seemed a kind of indecency to the boy.

Every now and then a shop had been turned into a committee room; and important men in ancient tall hats fussed in the doorways; carriages dashed up, from which other important men in ancient tall hats sprang; small idle crowds watched.

While Rudd stood in one of these inquisitive knots, a little band of important men hurried up, satellizing about a quiet, gentle-looking but distinguished man in a comfortable tweed suit, who smoked a long cigar. It was his father's rival, Brayshaw, the enemy of the house; yet strangely Rudd felt an admiration for him. He couldn't help it. There was no disloyalty in the feeling: simply this was the kind of swell that always took his fancy, the kind of swell that he himself would like to be if ever he could be a swell at all.

Without being rude or superior, Mr. Brayshaw obviously found the homage of the important men distasteful; but he had realized the necessity of going through with it, and was behaving as well as he could. He disappeared with his dependants into his committee rooms, principally to refill two large cigar-cases, and Rudd moved on with the memory of the curve of his father's back as he addressed the navvy too clear

in his mind. Should inclusion among the law-makers of England necessitate that?

Various people recognized him, and all asked him if he had a holiday to see his father get in. All his short life he had noticed the tendency of grown-up persons to say the same thing, but never more than this afternoon.

The dinner that evening was a kind of nightmare. In addition to Lord William Ruse, there were Sir Victor Uglow and Mr. Loney Imms, the famous Q.C., M.P. Mrs. Sergison was the only lady, and no one paid her any but the most perfunctory attention. As for Rudd, he was ignored completely. Mr. Sergison was very jumpy and ate almost nothing; the others ate heartily and drank accordingly. They were old stagers. This, Mr. Sergison's first election, was merely a detail in their routine, for they were all high on the Whip's list of provincial exhorters. By-election after by-election found them busily haranguing.

Their talk this evening was wholly on electioneering and wire-pulling, until they reached the respective merits and prices of wines. Mr. Loney Imms was the principal talker, as he spoke wagging his finger for greater emphasis. He seemed to think the others were the jury, and now and then he fixed Rudd's eye, which could not help looking at him, as though he was the foreman. But he said nothing to Rudd personally. The only one who spoke to him was Sir Victor Uglow, who asked if Rugby was played at

his school, and on hearing that it was not, lost all interest in him and it.

Rudd was to have a seat on the platform with his mother and other influential supporters of the Liberal cause in the town and neighbourhood; but when Mrs. Sergison begged to be excused, on account of a headache, he said that he should sit in the body of the hall, wherever he could: he had not enough courage for the platform, alone.

Mr. Sergison was far too much occupied with forethoughts of his speech to raise any objections, and Rudd was therefore allowed to go off first in order to get to the meeting early.

There is something about an election, even to a boy ignorant of everything that elections mean, that is both exciting and moving. The air is charged with electricity, of which even the non-political are conductors. As from his seat among the crowd Rudd surveyed the meeting his heart beat hardly less furiously than if his father had not been the central figure.

At first the company sang party songs, at intervals an important man calling for cheers for this honoured name and hisses or groans for that execrated one, all of which seemed curiously crude to Rudd, who had thought of school-boys as the only practitioners of such rites, and had never greatly admired them for it. But when the concourse on the platform at last fluttered and rose to its feet, and the band began to play "See the conquering hero comes," and from the advancing knot of black coats and white shirts the

form and features of his father emerged, Rudd's face burned, and when a woman next to him stood up and waved her handkerchief he longed to disappear into the ground. It seemed wrong for a member of the family to be present and witness the Sergison triumph and hear that ghastly tune.

Every one about him, he felt, must know that he was the hero's son. As a matter of fact none did; but how many years some of us have to spend in this world before we realize that we are not the centre of observation.

Mr. Sergison, though nervous, was neither flushed nor confused. Rudd, for the first time in his life, and, without putting the thought into words, thought him pathetic.

Then the noise died down, the people resumed their seats, and the meeting began.

The chairman first read a telegram from the Prime Minister wishing Rudd's father every success in his battle for the right; he then read a telegram from another Minister imploring the electors of Caston to return Mr. Sergison and thus once again prove their loyalty to the highest principles of public life and the great Liberal faith; and next a number of expressions of regret at unavoidable absence were made public.

The chairman then passed on to utter what he promised would be only three or four sentences—(No, no)—in praise of their candidate. (Applause.) Mr. Sergison was, he said, a respected resident of their great town, eager for its welfare. (Cheers.)

An ideal man to represent them, for, having retired from business, with all its worries and exactions, he was prepared to devote his whole time to the nation. (Cheers.) Of course it was late in the day to *introduce* Mr. Sergison to them. (Laughter.) They all knew him well—(cheers)—but this was his own first appearance as a chairman during the election, and he could not deny himself the pleasure—(applause)—of expressing his own high esteem of their candidate. (Renewed applause.)

That evening, he would add, they were peculiarly fortunate, for not only was Mr. Sergison among them —(applause)—but on the platform beside him were three such doughty warriors in the cause of Liberalism —(loud cheers)—such tried and trusted comrades in their ranks—(cheers)—always in the very forefront of the fighting line—(renewed cheers)—as Lord William Ruse, M.P.—(cheers)—Sir Victor Uglow, M.P.—(cheers)—and Mr. Loney Imms, Q.C., M.P. (Cheers.)

He did not know what type of tub thumper was regaling the rival meeting that evening with rancid eloquence—(laughter)—and specious promises—(renewed laughter)—but he would venture to wager—(applause)—that they had nothing there comparable with the rhetorical and intellectual treat in store for this audience. (Cheers.) He would now make way for Mr. Sergison. (Loud cheers.)

Rudd had been uncomfortable enough during the foregoing remarks, but when, as Mr. Sergison pre-

pared to rise, amid great enthusiasm, a big man in the gallery started singing "For he's a jolly good fellow," which the audience gradually took up, Rudd, his cheeks flaming more violently than before, realized that he could stand it no longer.

Nothing—the conviction had been growing within him—could make him listen to his father's speech. He had long been meditating flight, but this final outburst settled it. It was a public-house song. It had no bearing on politics or law-making. It meant smacking people on the back and having a drink. It was going to ruin everything for a man who was in earnest and had been reading Hansard for a month.

By dint of struggling and squeezing, Rudd got out just before his father uttered his opening words.

In the street he breathed again. He looked at his watch—it was only twenty past eight. Should he go home and comfort his mother? Yes; but first (brilliant inspiration) he would look in at the enemy's meeting, and see what that was like. He would like also another glimpse of that fascinating candidate. How would he be dressed to-night? How would he contrast with—— But no, that was not the way to think. "Poor father!" he murmured, yet why he chose the adjective he could not have explained.

The hall was packed, and the chairman was speaking. Rudd found a loophole between two short men's heads through which he could peer, and he picked out Mr. Brayshaw, who, unlike Mr. Sergison, was not in stiff evening dress, but wore a dinner jacket and soft

shirt. He looked quite at his ease and again was disguising the contempt which his too unctuous supporters provoked.

"What I say is this," the chairman was saying. He was a powerful-voiced horse-dealer in the town, possessed of great political influence among the poor. "What I say is this, that we are lucky in our candidate. (Cheers.) Our candidate is a gentleman. He may not live among us, but he has chosen us not only for his friends—(loud applause)—but, as I firmly hope and believe, for his constituents—(terrific applause)—and I for one appreciate the honour to the full." (Cheers.)

Rudd noticed how much more general was the excitement in this meeting.

"Politics aside," the chairman continued, referring to a paper, "for on them we are agreed—(cheers)—let us see what the Liberal candidate—(groans)—I say, let us see what the Liberal candidate—(more groans)—has done for the town in which he lives."

Rudd's heart sank. What was coming next? he apprehensively wondered, and wished he had gone straight home. But he must hear it out.

"I have here a list of the contributors to various local charities and improvements," said the chairman. "I will begin with the report of the new recreation ground. I turn to the list of subscribers, and what do I find under the letter S? I find 'Thomas Sergison, Esq., one guinea.' One guinea, gentlemen! (Scornful laughter.) Twenty-one paltry shillings in order

to help his poorer fellow-inhabitants to a game in the open air once a week!"

Rudd was horrified. If he had blushed in the other meeting, it was from an attack of delicacy probably quite false and to be resisted. But here his blood boiled at an outrage. This was low. Mr. Brayshaw ought not to allow it. Money had nothing to do with legislation. He began to back out.

"I turn next," the speaker relentlessly continued, "to the accounts of the Cottage Hospital, and what do I find? 'Thomas Sergison, Esq., one guinea.' And this is the gentleman to whom we are asked to entrust our interests in Parliament, this grudging subscriber to the well-being of his town! No, gentlemen, what I say is we want no curmudgeon to represent us." (Loud applause.)

Above the turmoil a voice in the body of the hall was heard.

"He gave another ten pounds a little while ago," it shouted.

Every head turned in that direction, and Rudd felt a thrill of pride in the courage of this supporter of his family honour.

But the chairman quickly extinguished it. "How long ago?" he asked.

"On the 13th," said the man, consulting a paper.

"Yes," said the chairman with a sneer, "and it was on the 12th that Mr. Sergison accepted the invitation of his party to stand for Caston! We know what that ten pounds was for. It wasn't for the Cottage

Hospital! (Loud cheers.) It was for the seat!" (Great excitement.)

Sicker at heart than before, Rudd, praying not to be recognized, continued to squeeze his way out, but it was very difficult, as he met more people pressing in.

"Jear that?" one man said to another. "That's the way. He's giving Sergison beans."

"I didn't know he was so mean," said another, "but I did know he was a windbag. And look at the way they heckled him last night. He hadn't an answer."

"Please let me pass," Rudd said desperately.

But before he could get through into the sweet night air he had to hear further and even more damaging criticisms.

His father had never been a demi-god; but this was awful. Was it true? Anyway, ought such things to be said of one's father? Was it not a defect in a father to be so vulnerable to such common people? Could anything like that be said of Mr. Brayshaw? But was Mr. Sergison so mean? Now Rudd came to think of it, lots of boys returned to school with a quid and he never had had more than half-a-crown.

Rudd reached home in a state of misery. His mother had gone to bed and he went to sit with her.

"Why didn't you stay?" she asked.

"I didn't like it," he said.

"Politics are very horrid," she replied with a sigh.

They held each other's hands in the firelight for a long while in silence.

"Why are you so unhappy?" Mrs. Sergison at last inquired.

Bit by bit Rudd told her.

"Is it true?" he managed at last to ask, thus voicing the question which she knew was in his depths.

"Politics always lead to low personalities," she said.

"But that ten pounds," Rudd asked, "wouldn't he have given it if he hadn't thought it might be useful for the election?"

"We mustn't examine father's actions like that," she said. "How I hoped he wouldn't touch the thing at all! But he has had to put himself in the hands of his agent—that little Mr. Quale, whom I expect you saw, with the little black moustache and white waistcoat—and I never liked him. In politics all kinds of tricks seem to be allowed—tricks that I hope you will always think low. Poor father! But remember that he has always been the best of fathers to you. Now go to bed, dear. To-morrow will be a terrific day, and we shall want all the sleep we can get."

But it was long before Rudd, on the drawing-room sofa, slept. He had visitations of shame that kept him restless and nervous: for his father, most of all; for his mother; for himself. In some vague way for Liberalism, too. A wise man would never have put himself in such a position. If a man like his father could afford ten pounds for a hospital in November, he could have afforded it at the time he gave only that miserable guinea. To a hospital, too, for poor people!

Gladstone, Bright, Fawcett—they wouldn't have done that!

He heard carriage-wheels and the hall full of loud men's voices. Lord William Ruse was laughing. Then the smoking-room door banged.

Rudd was glad he had not to say good-night to them.

Falling uneasily to sleep at last, he dreamed of barristers with confident smiles and strong white teeth, into whose cage his father and himself were being thrust; and with their hot breath scorching him, he woke in terror.

Mr. Sergison was defeated by a large majority, and Rudd took the news back to school on the day following the poll.

"You should have let me come and help," Pascoe said.

CHAPTER XV

THE STRANGE CASE OF MR. VOSPER

ONE afternoon in the summer holidays Rudd found a stranger at tea with his father and mother. His father called the stranger Sam, and the stranger called his father Tommy. It was the first time that Rudd had heard his father called Tommy, and there was something odd about it. His mother and his relations called him either Tom or Thomas. Rudd had become used to hearing his father called by his surname only, which for a long time had given him a kind of shock, as though of presumption or familiarity carried too far, even to a point of disrespect; but "Tommy" was quite a novelty. Rudd looked at his father with new eyes, as though searching for the traces of that lost boyhood or youth to which the affectionate diminutive was applicable, but he failed to find it.

The stranger, it seemed, was Mr. Samuel Vosper, and he and Rudd's father had been at school together and had remained friends. He was now a jovial shabby man, this Sam, with odd clothes, but Rudd

liked him instantly. He had a black beard and very white laughing teeth.

He was staying with his wife at one of the hotels. She was an invalid. He had come to ask Mr. and Mrs. Sergison to dine there that evening; Rudd, of course, must join them.

From remarks exchanged by his parents after Mr. Vosper's departure, Rudd learned that Sam Vosper was an odd fish: a man with the artistic temperament and very wide sympathies, who had been forced into business and had consistently failed. How he now lived, no one knew; probably his family contributed. However, here he was, aged about fifty, perfectly happy, tasting life like a collector, and never thinking of to-morrow except as containing a scheme of pleasure.

Rudd returned from the dinner-party in a glow of enthusiasm, for Mr. Vosper had been encouraging and sympathetic to him. Mrs. Sergison had always been so certain that no member of her family could write that she had treated his little essays and verses with perplexing lightness. Moreover, it was a tenet of her faith that a life given to literature was a waste, except, of course, when it produced the highest results, such as Longfellow's. She liked a quiet novel, but she liked the novelist to be also a serious person, like Trollope, who had an important appointment under the Postmaster-General. Art for Art's sake was a perilous theory. As for Mr. Sergison, he never asked to be

shown any of Rudd's effusions, nor would Rudd have dreamed of showing them to him.

And then came this sympathetic stranger, full of interest, who having drawn from Rudd the confession that he liked reading and had tried to write something himself, had set him a literary task. The way to write, he said, is to write about nothing. That is the real test. Dean Swift wrote an essay on a broomstick. Rudd must try to evolve strawless bricks too.

"Here, take this stone," Mr. Vosper had said—and he handed Rudd a pebble which he had picked up that day on the beach—"and write me an essay about that."

"But a pebble's not interesting," Rudd said.

"That doesn't matter," said Mr. Vosper. "The subject needn't be interesting. It's the author who has got to be interesting. No one should, of course, write an essay on anything at all till he knows that he is going to die; but that is a counsel of perfection. Let me have an essay about this pebble in a day or so, and then you shall take me for a walk one morning and I'll tell you how it strikes me."

All the rest of the evening Rudd was rolling the pebble between his fingers, wondering and wondering what he could find to say about it.

"Mind, no encyclopædia," were Mr. Vosper's last words to him. "It must be all out of your own head."

It was arranged that on the eventful morning of the criticism Rudd should fetch Mr. Vosper from the

hotel in time for an early train to a village under the hills, and they were to walk back.

Mr. Vosper was all ready, dressed more curiously than ever, so that even Rudd, all unconscious as he was of the nuances of clothes, could not help noticing that something was odd. He had a straw hat, a black frock-coat and trousers, and canvas sand-shoes. But his exuberant personality and all-round interest soon made any strangeness of attire negligible.

After bidding Mrs. Vosper a farewell so affectionate that it might have been a final parting, Mr. Vosper released her from his embrace and declared himself ready, and off they started.

Mr. Vosper said nothing about the essay till they were in the train. Then he pulled it from his pocket and began to criticize. He liked it, he said. It was good as far as it went; but that was not far enough. Rudd should have let himself go more freely.

"The most interesting thing to you about this pebble you haven't even mentioned," said Mr. Vosper. "You have said that it was made round by the sea, and all that sort of thing; you have said that it was found on Caston beach, and you have said something about the history and character of Caston, and so on. All very good. But the best thing of all you have missed."

"What is that?" Rudd asked.

"Can't you guess?" said Mr. Vosper, smiling.

Rudd couldn't.

"You didn't buy it?" Mr. Vosper said.

"No."

"Well then?"

But Rudd was dense.

"Why," said Mr. Vosper, "the most interesting thing is that I gave it to you. I am only a very ordinary person, with no power to write and no power to paint, yet tremendously keen on good books and good pictures; but I am probably the most interesting person you have met for a week or two, aren't I?"

"I should think so," said Rudd heartily.

"And," Mr. Vosper went on, "I know you like me or you wouldn't have written the essay or come out for a country walk with me; and yet you never even mention my existence when I ask you to be as digressive as you like about a pebble I drew from my pocket. Don't you see?"

Rudd was too young and immature to realize fully what all this meant; sixteen is very young for an author; but he never forgot it. As the years passed on and experience—without which to write about men and women is foolishness—came to him, he grew into it.

"In the long run," Mr. Vosper continued, "it's people that people want to read about. The proper study of mankind, said Pope, is man, and Pope knew most things. I must give you a Pope as a memento of our time together."

Alighting at the station they walked through the village on the way to the hills and thus home again.

As they were passing a house Mr. Vosper noticed a trim housemaid, with a laughing face and a spotless

cap, at an upper window, and to Rudd's amazement and disapproval, he stopped and kissed his hand to her. She smiled and blushed.

"Pretty dear! Pretty dear!" said Mr. Vosper, kissing his hand again. "I wish she would come down here a minute. I'd like to get at those lips. Pretty dear!"

They walked on, Mr. Vosper occasionally glancing back for a last look at the housemaid, and Rudd in a state of dismay.

He was remembering the warmth and depth of the embrace which Mr. Vosper had bestowed upon his wife that morning in the hotel. An invalid wife too! And now? So it was possible even for this remarkably interesting man who knew everything to want to kiss a pretty housemaid as well as that delicate distinguished lady.

But was that right?

No one could deny, however, that he knew a lot about literature: a jolly sight more than any master at school.

Still . . .

CHAPTER XVI

THE LATCH KEY

IT had always been Mrs. Sergison's wish that Rudd should be a doctor. Mr. Sergison proposed a walk of life that did not require so expensive a preparation, nor, with reason, did he consider Rudd likely to make a good doctor, for at that time he was often absent-minded and gave no signs that he would ever be a capable swift hand in emergencies. None the less, Mrs. Sergison having had her way, less through strength of will than a contribution from her own income to his allowance, Rudd was entered as a student at St. Stephen's Hospital in London.

Mr. Sergison took no further interest in the matter, except that at his club he now and then remarked that he had decided that his boy should be a medical man. "A noble profession," he would say. "A fine thing, healing one's fellow-creatures," he would say. "The great fight with pain and disease, don't you know."

As for Rudd, he had no great hopes from medicine, but so long as the principles of the pharmacopœia had to be acquired in London he was ready enough. London was the place.

The next step was to find Rudd's lodgings, and here Uncle Ben came on the scene. Mrs. Sergison would have liked Rudd to live with her brother, who had an odd room or two in his ramshackle upper-part in Westminster, but Uncle Ben was firm against it.

"No," he said, "relations shouldn't live together." Much better too that Rudd should be wholly on his own. And let him rough it a bit and have to scheme to make both ends meet. The smaller the allowance, the more the fun. Enough money when one was young was a great mistake; there should be management and denials. No dinner one day, for example, in order to enjoy a double one the next. No lunch, in order to buy a book or a print.

Rudd agreed heartily with the first part of this statement; for his one idea was to be on his own. From what he knew of London he wanted to live either in the Temple or Staple Inn.

"Of course you do," said Uncle Ben, who was entertaining his sister and nephew to lunch before the great hunt began. "So does everybody in your position. But it can't be done—not on two pounds a week for everything."

A nice boarding-house was Mrs. Sergison's idea, but Uncle Ben here came to Rudd's rescue.

"No," he said. "That's no good for him. In the first place, there aren't any nice boarding-houses, and in the second place, London will be no use to the boy if he is having his meals at regular hours with a lot of people. He's not that sort. No, we must find a bed-

sitting-room, with breakfast inclusive, at a reasonable rate, not too far from the hospital."

"I know of such a nice family who would make Rudd one of themselves at Turnham Green," said Mrs. Sergison.

"Then forget it," said Uncle Ben. "We don't want Turnham Green. We want to be within half an hour's walk of the hospital, or ten minutes by bus, in London proper, or improper, and we don't want to be one of any family, except the great human family. That's it, isn't it, Rudd?"

"Yes," said Rudd. "But are you sure Staple Inn's too dear?"

"Certain. That can come later when you have made a little extra by your pen or your father raises your allowance. Now for the 'Britannia.'"

"What's that?" asked Mrs. Sergison.

"A public-house," said Uncle Ben. "It is somewhere round there that we will look first."

"Must we?" Mrs. Sergison asked. "I don't like Rudd to be so near a public-house."

"That's all right," said Uncle Ben. "In London all the omnibus centres are called after public-houses. It's a wicked city, you know. Come along now and begin."

With the assistance of a four-wheeler by the hour, they made a thorough search of such likely-looking houses as had "Apartments" over the door—likely in Uncle Ben's view being unlikely in Mrs. Sergison's, and likely in hers being unlikely in his, for, as he was

quickly able to demonstrate, very clean doorsteps and muslin curtains mean nothing.

"That's no real test," he said. "The test is inside. There are several better things to go by than that. There's the smell of the house; there's the servant who opens the door; there's the landlady; and if you have the chance of seeing them, there are the other occupants."

The application of these touchstones eliminated house after house. This landlady was too grasping, that too weary and overworked; this too slatternly, that too self-righteous and prim; this one drank and that one looked as if she might. "Although that's not necessarily an objection," Uncle Ben explained. "The best landlady I ever had—generous, good-tempered, uncomplaining and a fine cook—was always a little bit fuddled, bless her old heart! And on occasions—when the event called for it—tight as a lord."

"My dear Ben," said Mrs. Sergison, "I do wish you wouldn't be so lenient."

"You have to be—in London," said Uncle Ben. "Otherwise you couldn't get on at all. Cupboards so packed with skeletons that if you didn't disregard them life wouldn't be worth living."

"I don't like it for Rudd," said his mother.

"Then why make him a doctor?" Uncle Ben asked. "Doctors meet human nature at its weakest and most off its guard. You can't keep doctors in cotton wool."

Mrs. Sergison sighed. "I suppose not," she said.

In the end a bed-sitting-room on a top floor was found in Mornington Crescent, at the corner of which George Cruikshank (as a tablet said) lived and died and in one of the houses of which, as Uncle Ben remembered, Tennyson left the MS. of "In Memoriam."

"It's a beautiful room," said the landlady. "You can see Primrose Hill from it."

"The point is," said Uncle Ben, "what can you see *in* it? I should like to see a chest of drawers that would hold something, for example, and curtains that would keep out the light."

"You're a noticing one," said the landlady. "If you'll pay a month's rent in advance I'll do just what you want and more too."

And so after a hundred questions from Mrs. Sergison as to airing of sheets and so forth, and a little beating down by Uncle Ben, whom the landlady would much rather have had as a lodger than the rather gloomy looking youth who was with him, the room was secured at the inclusive price of sixteen shillings a week, breakfast included, and coal sixpence per scuttle extra.

This settled, they re-entered the four-wheeler to take Mrs. Sergison to the train and fetch Rudd's luggage from the cloak-room.

All the way there his hand was in his pocket, his fingers tightly clasped round his first latch key.

"Well, my boy, you're launched on the sea of London and life," said Uncle Ben as he was leaving them on their way to the station. "You're coming

to me to lunch every Sunday, remember. Meanwhile, let me give you one piece of advice. Be *in* as many sets and spheres of activity as you can; but don't be *of* any. And don't forget I'm always handy. Advice on tap, day and night. By the way, here's that five pounds I owe you," and having discharged this wholly mythical debt, Uncle Ben sprang on a bus step and was gone.

Later in the evening, when his things were unpacked, Rudd walked out for a meal, and returning down the Tottenham Court Road had his first London adventure.

In front of him was a poorly-dressed woman of about thirty, struggling with a large clothes-basket which was much too big and too heavy for her.

"Let me help you," Rudd said, catching her up and taking one of the handles as he spoke.

The woman looked at him in terror and snatched at his hand.

"Let go or I'll scream for the police," she cried.

Rudd let go as if it were an adder and hurried on, mortified to the quick to have been so misunderstood.

He tingled under the thought of it long after. How was a boy of his age to know that in the Mother of Cities even Good Samaritans must walk warily?

CHAPTER XVII

LAVIS

RUDD was soon settled at St. Stephen's and he did his best to work, but all the while as he sat at lectures or read in the library the murmur of London echoed in his head. How could so curious a youth hear this entrancing sound and be satisfied with cold print? That the students of villages like Oxford or Cambridge should neglect their duties is grotesque; but the marvel is that in London any book-work is done at all with such siren voices as hers ever calling.

For a while he made no Hospital friends, and then one day a new-comer arrived—a tall, thin, hatchet-faced man of about twenty-seven, dressed loosely in tweeds.

"That's the man for me," Rudd thought; but not for a week or so did he meet him.

And then Lavis himself broke the ice.

It was in the little eating-house near the Hospital. Above it was the billiard-room where, at the most seductive of games of skill, many of the students lost whatever chances of medical distinction might have

been in store for them and gave up to ivory what was meant for mankind.

Rudd took a seat opposite the lean and rugged but kindly-looking person whom he had seen from time to time in the corridor of the reading-room, and considered the bill of fare.

"Whatever you do," said his companion, in a deep voice, looking up from his work, "don't have the stewed beef. It was prepared wholly in the interests of the toothpick industry."

The next day they had lunch together again, and gradually they became friendly. Rudd accepted an invitation to Lavis's rooms, and would have returned it but that his own bed-sitting-room was not suitable for hospitality, being at the top of a building inhabited by people who went to bed at ten, apparently for no other purpose than to make notes upon any sounds that might be heard in the house after that hour and report them to the landlady in the morning. Nothing less encouraging to young men's nocturnal conviviality could be imagined.

Lavis's rooms were maintained on a more liberal principle, and here, in an atmosphere of tobacco smoke, among books and engravings, Rudd listened to iconoclastic talk and assimilated new views and ideals.

Lavis was from Vancouver, and had but just decided, so late in life, to be a doctor. "There's no money in it," he said, "but it's one of the few decent businesses. One is doing something and not getting

the better of anybody all the time, as most of the others have to."

Lavis now had means, but had been roughing it as a surveyor for some years. Directly the funds arrived, through his father's death, he had put his favourite project into action.

Lavis did as he liked and never seemed to think of what others thought. He had a dress suit, and looked anything but a waiter or a trombonist in it, but he wore it as seldom as possible. Even in his dress suit he had a receptacle for a pipe. Cigars and cigarettes he despised, and more than one restaurant was barred to him because he not only refused to obey the order forbidding the smoking of pipes but insisted on delivering a caustic lecture on the subject to the manager.

Women had no interest for him whatever. Without saying so, it was clear that he regarded them as a general interference with male comfort. In their company he was low-voiced, attentive and deferential, but he was glad to be outside again in the fresh air.

Like so many colonials, he had read much, especially the new writers, and there seemed to be no bound to his interests. He would go to the Opera as much as to the Halls; haunt the National Gallery and Lord's; explore Whitechapel not less than Wiltshire.

It was Lavis who brought Rudd under the spell of the great and gracious stage figure of those times. Together they were assiduous supporters of the most

perfect production in the modern theatre, the Lyceum "Much Ado About Nothing," and not only witnessed that incomparable gentleman, Irving's Benedick, move hither and thither amid the Italian crowd in his gravely humorous perplexity, but heard the unforgettable tones and saw the unforgettable charm and gesture with which Beatrice (Queen of Women) said "There was a star danced, and under that was I born," and, a little later, came mischievously out from the banquet to her victim to bid him, against her will, to dinner.

Rudd and Lavis had their regular places at the Lyceum—almost as if they were subscribers to the Opera. They did not sit at all, but stood leaning over the barrier between the pit and the stalls. They thus made the best of both worlds, their upper parts being swells and their lower democrats, for though their legs were in the half-crown part, their heads were in the half-guinea.

It was Lavis who discovered three stanzas which turned Rudd's head and sent him singing through the day for weeks and weeks and never wholly left him. They came to him in a letter from Lavis, then in the country. "My dear Boy," he wrote, "here is something to get you out of London. If it were longer I wouldn't have the pluck to copy it; and if it were longer it wouldn't be perfect."

All day Rudd found himself murmuring—

"I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree."

It was Lavis who made friends with the captain of a river tug-boat with whom they made midnight voyages to Gravesend all among the shipping.

They had their less reputable enterprises too.

Lavis had a way of discovering things. Perhaps one has to be a late-comer to London to do this; the born Londoners so quickly become villagers, living within their own small area, eating and drinking in the same places, and seeing the same people, just as at Little Pedlington; but the inquiring strangers really investigate. Rudd had investigated too, but he had not Lavis's imperturbable readiness to go anywhere or everywhere alone. Rudd was enterprising and curious, but without Lavis he would never, for example, have found Sing Loo. He would have wanted to, but when the time came he would have weakened. With Lavis to join him and share the novelty, the rest was natural.

With all his varied experience in the West, Lavis of course had smoked opium; and this was one of the things which, for some vague reason, Rudd wished to do.

"You frontiersmen have all the luck," he said.

"There's nothing in it," Lavis assured him. Unless, he added, one persevered and fell to the habit, and then of course one was a silly idiot.

"I want to try," said Rudd. "I want to try everything."

"Very well," said Lavis. "Have your own way." And late one summer night—indeed in the small

hours, after the "Gambrinus" had closed, and under a sky that had never been really dark—they walked through the deserted City right away to Aldgate and farther.

After proceeding a little way along the Commercial Road, they turned to the right down a narrow street with Chinese signs in it, and at a door on the left Lavis knocked three times. Footsteps were heard on the stairs, and the door was unlocked and opened by a Chinese youth with a bicycle lamp, who, after scrutinizing them closely, led the way up a narrow staircase and through a passage to an empty room. "Wait here," he said, and disappeared.

The house was close and dirty: filled with the East End smell, into which crept something strange and aromatic. Voices were heard in a neighbouring room.

"Don't lean against the wall," said Lavis.

"Why not?" Rudd asked.

"You must guess," said Lavis. "Later, when you're a doctor in a poor district, you'll know."

The boy now returned, led them a little farther, and flung open a door. The change from darkness to light was very sudden, and for a moment Rudd was dazed. Then he saw an old Chinaman with a very yellow face seated on a sofa, holding something over a small flame. By his side was a woman gaudily dressed. On a bed, to the right, sat another and younger woman, a girl in fact. On the left was a screen. The room was heavy with the aromatic scent and thick with smoke.

The old Chinaman wished them good evening in a cordial whisper. The two women giggled, and the one on the bed made room for Rudd, who, however, remained standing.

"You want smoke?" the Chinaman asked Lavis, again whispering, and Lavis said that he wanted nothing of the kind, but his friend wished to try.

"Why don't you?" the older woman asked Lavis. "It's splendid. I've got a pipe of my own at home. It makes you forget everything."

"I don't want to forget everything; I want to remember it," said Lavis. "That's the difference."

The woman looked at him searchingly for a moment and then laughed.

"That's all right for you," she said. "Hurry up, uncle. There's precious little I want to remember."

Lavis sat on the arm of the sofa and watched the old Chinaman.

"These ladies first," said Sing Loo, and he began again to move a little black ball of something that sizzled backwards and forwards and round and round over the flame.

"Now," he whispered, holding out the pipe, and the older woman leaned back among the cushions and began to smoke, with her eyes closed. There was no doubt about her pleasure in it. The suction made a little sighing sound.

"Beautiful," she said, and relapsed into ecstasy, while the girl, who was evidently new to it, watched her, fascinated.

Rudd meanwhile sat down on the bed, but leapt up again as a voice from the sheets called out, "Get off my leg, confound you!"

"I'm awfully sorry," Rudd said. "I thought it was empty."

"Yes, but why on earth," said the voice, "can't you let me get to sleep?—coming here at this time of night to smoke that filthy stuff!"

The girl leaned over and said something to him, and they both laughed.

"That's my son," said the old Chinaman to Rudd. "It's all right."

"He speaks perfect English," said Rudd.

"Of course he does," said the girl. "He's at Oxford. Aren't you, Charley?"

"Oh, go to blazes!" said Charley, "and let me sleep."

"Now, Amy," said the woman, "it's your turn," and Amy left the bed to watch the preparation of her pipe, and Rudd took her place nearer the head of the bed.

"Are you really at Oxford?" he asked its occupant.

"Of course I am. I wish I was there now. I can't get any sleep at all in this place with all the row that goes on every night and the smell of that cursed opium."

Rudd noticed that his features were undoubtedly Chinese.

"My brother's wiser; he doesn't even try," Charley added.

"Where is your brother?" Rudd asked.

"Behind that screen—reading," said Charley, and Rudd crossed over, and looking round the screen, found a yellow-skinned youth poring over a Chinese book. Lavis joined him.

"Well, of all the places!" Rudd said. "Is that fellow really at Oxford?"

"Certainly," said Lavis.

"And all living in this room?" Rudd asked.

"The Chinese haven't many personal needs," said Lavis. "That's all right."

The other woman was now whispering to Charley, and Amy, leaning back, was being taught by the old Chinaman how to smoke properly.

"Take it quietly," he whispered, and prodded the smouldering ball. The other woman came over to help.

"Just breathe it in," she said. "Shut your eyes and enjoy it."

"I don't see anything in it," said Amy.

"No, but you will," said the other.

"If you take my advice, you'll never touch it again," said Charley from the bed. "It's beastly stuff. The very smell of it makes me sick."

The old Chinaman laughed softly, and began to smoke his own pipe again, surveying the room and the two women with placid eyes. Amy was not more than twenty; the other woman, whom she called Belle, was ten or more years older, and battered. Belle was evidently an old hand here. She beckoned

to Rudd and leered at him, but he drew farther away. This kind of woman horrified him.

"Your friend's not very sociable," Belle said to Lavis.

"He's tired," said Lavis, "and this place is enough to make anyone faint. Are you going to try, or are you sick of it all?" he asked Rudd.

Rudd said that he should see it through; and all being ready, the old Chinaman whispered to him to take Amy's place and lean back comfortably, and then with one or two last twirls of the opium over the flame, placed the thin brass stem between his lips. They all joined in his education, except the two sons.

"Don't pull at it," Belle said. "Breathe it in quietly. Like in'aling." Rudd did so, but experienced none of the sweet dreaminess which he had expected. He disliked the taste, but persevered until in about two minutes, the pipe was done.

"Well?" Lavis asked.

"I don't feel any different," Rudd said. "Let's go."

Charley had begun to snore; his brother still pored over the Chinese characters; the two women, who had evidently been drinking, were becoming maudlin.

"How much?" Lavis asked.

"Ten shillings," whispered the old Chinaman, who was again smoking in perfect content.

"Well," said Lavis, as they emerged again into the street and fresh air, "that's sin. Strange how narrow a line can divide it from dullness."

CHAPTER XVIII

SHOWING HOW ONE THING LEADS TO ANOTHER

ONE of the most serious thoughts that life provokes is the reflection that we can never tell, at the time, whether a word, a look, a touch, an occurrence of any kind, is trivial or important.

A lonely visitor to London once bought himself a ticket for a music-hall. Just as he entered a restaurant for dinner he met some old friends and joined their table. Time went on; there was much to say: and it was not till it was nearly ten that he remembered his ticket.

"Wait a minute," he said, for he was a kindly impulsive soul, and he stepped out into the Strand and watched the passers-by.

After a minute or so a young man sauntered past, alone. He obviously had nothing to do.

"Excuse me," said the visitor to London, "but I bought this ticket for a music-hall to-night, and having met some friends I don't want it. If you are free, perhaps you might care to make use of it?"

The young man, being in the Strand, where gold bricks are sold, and long-firm and confidence trick

men notoriously assemble, at first was suspicious; but realizing that the offer was genuine, he accepted the ticket with thanks, and went on his way.

The visitor to London returned to his friends, told them what he had done, and was felicitated upon his action. Most of the others said that they would merely have torn the ticket up. "Jolly decent of you," they agreed.

The young man was a steady, sensible fellow, an engineer, who had just become engaged to a nice girl at Kettering. They were to be married in eight months' time, and meanwhile he had no thought of changing his employers.

He took his stall in the music-hall, and during the performance found himself conversing with an elderly man next to him, who was also alone. The elderly man was a mine-owner in West Africa, who wanted some one to go out there at once and draw up a report. Before the evening was out the young man had agreed to sail that week, with a handsome fee for his alacrity.

He sailed, made the report, and was shot dead by a native, in mistake for the mine-manager, on the day he was leaving to return.

If he had not been offered that ticket he might have been alive to-day, and the nice girl at Kettering would not have gone into a decline out of sheer broken-heartedness.

Chance can never be directed or anticipated; nor

can its workings, when it chooses to interfere, be recognized except retrospectively.

In the life of Rudd, as of every one else, chance played a capricious part. It was never more active than when he decided to attend the debate on Socialism. Rudd was going to it, not because he was interested in the subject, one way or the other, but because he and certain of his friends, who wished to be there, were afterwards to drink lager beer.

For the whole business of politics, with which he grouped debates on whatever topic, Rudd, although he was true to certain men who formulated his father's creed, had had nothing but dislike, mixed with suspicion, ever since the Caston election; and he could think of no argument that would under any circumstances get him on his legs in a mixed audience either in support or opposition.

Support indeed was from him even less likely than opposition, for at that time he was always more eager to condemn what he thought wrong than to extol what he thought right. It may have been that he felt vaguely that the right could look after itself, or perhaps antipathies offered surer ground.

Rudd dined that evening with Doran in one of the Soho restaurants the discovery of which was just then a pastime. A competition was in progress among London's ex-waiters with a little capital as to which could give the best eighteenpenny lunch or half-crown dinner, and Rudd and his friends had constituted themselves honorary judges of this event.

That evening he and Doran, having a little more money than usual, selected the "Venezia" in Old Compton Street, and they were just settling down to their *hors-d'œuvres* and Chianti when they saw Godsmark enter.

Godsmark, who was to be the defender of Socialism that evening, did not see them, but approached a table laid for one, some distance away, where he seemed to be expected, took off his overcoat, revealing evening dress beneath, and sat down to a solitary repast.

From time to time Godsmark glanced at the paper, but he did not let it interfere seriously with his appetite or his enjoyment. He never looked Rudd's way. He drank champagne.

The hall where the debate was to be held was in Bloomsbury, and just before Rudd and Doran reached it they saw in the roadway a crowd, which they joined. The centre of the crowd was a horse and wagon. The wagon was overloaded, and the horse was unable to start again owing to the weight behind it. Such troubles are still a common sight in Covent Garden, but they were common everywhere then. The driver was pulling at the bridle and uttering encouraging cries, while several men were pushing either the wagon itself or the spokes of the wheels, to give the thing a start. The leader of these men, who was making rallying noises so that the push could come from all at once, was Curnow, who was to oppose Godsmark in the debate a little later.

In a short while the wagon moved again, the driver sprang to the box, the crowd melted into individuals, and Rudd and Doran entered the meeting.

Godsmark began. Rising briskly to his feet and expanding his broad chest, spotless from its *nettoyage à sec,* he plunged, with a confident smile, into the merits of his universal panacea—Socialism. He was a fluent and confident speaker with a bland and benevolent face, and he arranged his arguments skilfully. Debates were life-blood to him.

Curnow, who replied, was very different. He was a poor speaker and was shabby in dress; but he did what he could to prove the futility of Godsmark's position, and the meeting was then thrown open.

Rudd listened with more interest than he had anticipated. It was not a debate in the strict sense of the word, for each speaker had brought cut and dried arguments which bore little relation to what had gone before; but the pros and cons of Socialism were fairly arranged during the evening. It emerged as a more reasonable possibility than Rudd had ever thought it, and red ties and vegetarianism were shown to be not its inevitable concomitants.

"I will now," said the chairman, who was to be one of Rudd's party, later on, when dialectics were to give place to conviviality, "call on a few gentlemen in the room who have not yet spoken, and whose views we should like to hear: the amateurs of discussion, as I may say, to distinguish them from the professionals

and experts who have been favouring us with their voluntary views. I first call on Mr. Doran."

Doran rose reluctantly, mumbled a few apologies as to his inability to speak, and sat down.

"Mr. Creal," said the chairman.

Creal for some moments refused to budge; but at length was forced into a position which was not sitting and not standing, but something painfully uncomfortable between the two, and thus hovering he made the superfluous confession that oratory was not in his line, and collapsed as though his backbone had suddenly turned to butter.

"Mr. Sergison," said the chairman.

Rudd was electrified. He had not the faintest idea that he could possibly be involved in this exhibition, and for the moment he was rendered dumb and void. But then realizing how contemptible it would be if every one behaved as Doran and Creal had done, he determined to do his best. Yet he had no argument that was pertinent. He never had: he saw everything either whole or very much piecemeal: whole, in a flash which he was still young enough to mistrust, and piecemeal in such minute portions as to be almost impossible to define. If ever there was a philosopher *d'escalier* it was he. Not only his wit but his very creed was on those steps.

None the less, he knew in his heart that on this occasion, with all these strangers present and that insufferable, self-satisfied Godsmark in his evening

dress, something must be done, and he must try and do it. The honour of the Hospital demanded it.

"Mr. Chairman and gentlemen," he said, "I will not detain you by expressions of surprise at being called upon, or statements of my inability to speak in public. Nor can I offer either a constructive defence of Socialism or criticism of it. All that I know about it I have learned this evening; but the strange part of it is that I learned it before the meeting began." (Laughter, which gave Rudd, who was amazed at the tractability of his vocabulary, increased confidence.)

"This evening," he continued, "has indeed been peculiarly instructive. It has provided me with two scenes which make an odd and entertaining contrast. Two hours ago it was the privilege of Mr. Doran, the gentleman who has just made such a remarkable speech—(laughter)—and myself to observe, in a restaurant, the principal Socialist speaker here dining copiously with but one companion, a bottle of champagne. Half an hour later we watched the principal Anti-Socialist speaker here helping a poor man with his horse."

Rudd paused. "Mr. Godsmark," he continued, "therefore, I think, must have my vote, since after witnessing an exhibition of such public friendliness as Mr. Curnow's, I feel bound to support a Socialist."

Rudd here sat down amid tremendous applause.

The immediate result of Rudd's successful eloquence was that on the next day a deputation of med-

ical students waited upon him to ask if he would take the editorship of *The Scalpel,* the Hospital magazine, which would be vacant next term. After consulting with Lavis, Rudd said he would.

The secondary result was that his Uncle Ben urged him to send a copy of *The Scalpel* to the editor of *The Post-Meridian,* stating that it was largely his own work; and the editor replied asking Rudd to contribute something now and then.

The third result—but we shall see.

CHAPTER XIX

THE STOAT

IT was on a Sunday in June. Rudd and Lavis were eating their lunch on the top of Chanctonbury, when suddenly they heard screams. The anguished sounds grew louder, and there ran across an open space a rabbit followed hard by a stoat. The stoat fastened upon it the next moment.

Rudd leapt up, but Lavis held him back.

"Let me go," said Rudd.

"What for?"

"I must stop that," said Rudd. The rabbit was screaming more piteously than ever.

"Nonsense," said Lavis. "The stoat's got it. Let him have it."

"It's too horrible," said Rudd.

"It's nature," said Lavis.

But Rudd broke away and the stoat disappeared in the bushes.

Lavis came up and looked at the rabbit. Its eyes were bulging with terror, brighter than jewels. Its heart beat almost audibly. Blood oozed from a bite in its back. It quivered with pain.

Lavis picked it up and broke its neck on the toe of his boot.

"That's all you've done with your humanity," he said. "It had to die anyway, and now you've cheated an honest hard-working stoat out of a meal. Very likely there is a starving stoat family close by."

They returned to their lunch.

"It's very difficult," Rudd said.

"What is?"

"Nature," said Rudd. "You pitched into me for being sorry for the rabbit and trying to stop its death. Do you suggest that my humanity, as you call it, is any less natural than the stoat's carnivorousness or your sense of justice?"

"I don't know," said Lavis. "I've often wondered whether pity is a cultivation or one of mankind's unfortunate birthrights."

"My idea is that it's too prompt not to be an instinct," said Rudd.

"Well, I didn't have any just then," said Lavis. "I was a pro-stoat. And I'm not more natural than you."

"Oh yes, you are," said Rudd; "all you colonials are."

"More primitive," said Lavis, "not more natural. We're all about equally natural, I guess."

"Well, I can't see a sight like that," said Rudd, "and, even more, hear it, without wanting to stop it. And stoats are such awful brutes. I've read about them. They pursue a rabbit for hours. They'll run

right through a crowd of fatter ones and never turn their heads, because it's just that one that they want and nothing can stop them getting him. That's ghastly. It's persecution as well as murder."

"He who made the rabbit made the stoat," said Lavis. "It's all part of the scheme, I suppose. All of us are pursued in the same way, by bad consciences and disease; and we all end in the same way—death."

"Well," said Rudd, "I'm not sufficiently in tune with the infinite, I suppose, to be so philosophical. I shall always sympathize with the oppressed."

"That's your Christianity," said Lavis. "But Christianity doesn't work. It never has worked, and what's more, in my opinion, it was never meant to."

"Why do you think it was not meant to?" Rudd asked in some astonishment. "I've heard often enough that it couldn't work, but never that it was not intended to."

"Because Christ was an ironist," said Lavis. "We are brought up to drop our voices when we mention him, and everything is done to prevent us from thinking of him as possessing the ordinary characteristics of a man; yet a man he had deliberately chosen to be. And looking at him purely as a human revolutionary, one can see him most naturally as an ironist. His especial bugbears were riches and pride; and he was always scoring off them. All the beatitudes are an attack on material power. All the promises are for the poor. His great pleasure was to make the poor happy; his religion was his gift

to them. But the impulse behind it, as I believe, was as much the wish to irritate and humiliate the rich as to benefit the poor. He could not take riches and power away, so he glorified the advantages of having none. He could not give the poor money, and he did not believe in their capacity to rise and win it for themselves, so he told them to be patient and their reward would be in heaven. Christ had no illusions about the rich either needing his religion or adopting it. It conflicts with indulgence too consistently for so shrewd an observer not to have known that. It was not a scheme of practical life for rulers; it was an anodyne for the oppressed and unfortunate."

Lavis was now warmed up. Not only was he on a favourite theme but he had exactly the listener he most desired: a youth sufficiently young to be impressionable.

Rudd lay on his back looking up at the cloudless sky. The song of a lark filtered down to them; distant sheep bells sounded; a scent of warm turf was in the air; at their feet beyond the juniper bushes was the weald, stretching away for miles until lost in the haze.

Lavis's voice rose. "The horrible thing is," he said, "that the rulers, the rich, the proud, have collared Christ's religion and adapted it to suit their purposes. That's the most ironical thing in history. The anodyne for the poor has become a vast business concern. In this country it is a branch of the State

and Christ, could he return to life, might have the pleasure of seeing an Archbishop of Canterbury at fifteen thousand a year consecrating the new colours of a regiment. He could see also Parliament opening with prayer and then voting huge sums to the army and navy. Not that that would surprise him. There is nothing in human nature that would surprise him: but he could hardly help smiling when he found that we call ourselves a Christian nation and dispatch missionaries in his name all over the earth. 'Father, forgive them,' he would perhaps murmur, 'for they know what they do.'"

"How much of the life of Christ do you believe in?" Rudd asked.

"In nearly everything but the miracles. I believe that he had great magnetic personality, few needs, and a proper hatred of unhappiness. I don't believe he wanted to alter outer conditions at all, as is the usual manner of the reformer, but instead to provide the unhappy poor with some compensation or consolation for missing the material pleasures. I don't believe that he himself believed all that he said: I think he knew that many of his counsels were counsels of perfection, but he knew also that they were the better for that. They formed an ideal to reach after. I believe that he said 'Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's,' and I think it the least inspired moment of his life and a proof that he was not a stranger to worldly discretion. I believe that he said of the Magdalen that she should be forgiven much

'because she had loved much,' and I think it his most human utterance, and I defy even the adroitest Canon to preach a sermon upon it satisfactory to the reason of any ordinary man. I believe that he was crucified. And there I stop."

"And you don't think Christianity possible?" Rudd asked.

"Of course I don't. Not for more than a few minutes at a time. But that doesn't matter. The ideal is the thing. Pure Christianity is like poetry and pictures: life is more beautiful for them all. But in times of stress all are forgotten, and life still goes on, and men cheat and slander and hit each other. And it isn't as if Christ invented the ordinary decencies which keep communities together and make existence comfortable. There were kindness and generosity and charity and give-and-take æons before Christ was born. What he did was to graft upon ordinary good conduct certain impossible ideals, such as turning the other cheek and loving one's neighbour as one's self, which only a poet or ironist could have thought of and only an anchorite could practise. And in the course of spreading his glad tidings among the poor he gathered such a rabble together that the Government became nervous and thought him better out of the way. That is how I think of it."

"Then would you have the New Testament prohibited?" Rudd asked.

"Of course not. What an idea! I wouldn't have a word altered or made less accessible. No, what I

say is, spread the Gospels as much as you can, but stop calling England a Christian country. That's the outrage."

Lavis ceased and lit his pipe.

The sun was growing hotter. The scent of thyme came over the grass on a light breeze in warm waves. The larks still sang. The dead rabbit lay where Lavis had dropped it.

They had not gone a hundred yards on their way when they met a shepherd.

"There's a rabbit a stoat's just killed, by that thorn tree," said Lavis.

The shepherd thanked him and went off to get it.

"There," said Lavis, "I'm more of a Christian than you after all. You never thought to mention that. A rabbit's a big thing in a shepherd's kitchen."

CHAPTER XX

THE BEAUTIFUL PINK SLIP

RUDD pursued his medical studies without enthusiasm but with a certain amount of method. That is to say, he gave them all the time that was left after he had eaten and slept, talked and wandered with Lavis, trifled with efforts at verse, and heard the last comic song at the Mogul.

Any new verses, if they pleased him, he would send to Uncle Ben, and one day Uncle Ben wrote back saying, "Why don't you submit the enclosed to a paper? It is much better than heaps of stuff they print. I notice that *The Post-Meridian* has verse nearly every day. Why not try that?"

Rudd did so: and being a beginner, enclosed a letter deprecating his temerity and depreciating his poem, but hoping for kind consideration.

The next day he woke up aware vaguely of some impending excitement, but unable to remember it. Then he remembered and tingled.

All the morning he was restless, and twice he went round to the nearest station to see if *The Post-Meridian* had come in yet. It hadn't.

Rudd as a rule resented the evening papers arriving on the streets as early as they did; but to-day he thought that *The Post-Meridian* ought to have more enterprise. Here it was, nearly twelve, and the paper not out yet! An important paper too.

He returned to the Hospital, and in a quarter of an hour was back at the station again.

A pile of *Post-Meridians* had just been placed on the stall. Rudd tendered his penny with a hand which he did his best to steady, and glanced at the paper with the eager expression of a betting man: instantly passing into a state of rapt bliss, for his poem was before his enraptured gaze.

He was reading his first poem in real professional Luard-approved print!

He blinked and stared. Yes, it was his.

His face flushed with triumph. He began to read it aloud, but remembered where he was.

A comma was wrong, but otherwise the gem was as he wrote it, and the initials "R. S." were at the end.

What a pity he had not had the proof. Not only for that comma, but he could have improved the last couplet. Still how splendid it looked!

He read it again.

Then he bought three more copies, one for Lavis, one for his mother (who would not, however, understand the point of the satire), and one for Uncle Ben.

He wondered if the bookstall men had read it.

"Not bad verses in *The Post-Meridian* to-day," he half thought of saying to the bookstall man; for why should not pleasure be widely spread? He contented himself, however, with watching the purchasers of the paper to see how they took it. But all were interested in the foolish first page where the trumpery political and other news was. News indeed!

Rudd had said nothing to Lavis about his verses, but before anyone Lavis must know the terrific truth that Rudd was in print in a public paper which had the eccentric habit of remunerating its contributors. Every one can be in print in the other things, *The Scalpel* and so forth. But Rudd was now a working paid satirist. His first shaft had left the bow. Others would follow. Public men must jolly well look out.

He ran back with *The Post-Meridian* and began to hunt through the hospital for Lavis. Up and down he tried, but drew blank. Yet that Lavis had not left the precincts old Flanagan the porter had reason to be sure.

And then came the news that Lavis was in the dissecting-room.

The dissecting-room!

All these months Rudd had avoided that horrid place: all these months he had known somewhere in his soul that his aversion from it would never decrease. Then how be a doctor? That was just it; that was the problem which had vexed him continuously, although now, of course, it was negligible, since from this morning he had the journalistic ball at his

feet. But even though the room was receding so rapidly as a necessity in his career, he could not bring himself even now, just for one final visit, to enter it. There was something about it . . .

He sent word by Flanagan that he must see Lavis at once, and would be waiting for him in the reading-room.

The porter returned with the message that Mr. Lavis couldn't possibly leave what he was doing for two hours, and so would Mr. Sergison go down to him?

Rudd had never confided to Lavis his dread of the dissection branch of the curriculum: for he was not given to parade his timidities. To refuse to go down now would be impossible.

He pulled himself together and descended with the epoch-making paper in his hand. He opened the door, and was conscious of Lavis all alone at the end of a long room, with slabs in it. Lavis was dressed in an overall and was bending over something shapeless and brown. The air was thick with a sour smell. Rudd took a few steps into the room, felt a violent nausea, and bolted.

A poor end to his triumph.

Outside the door he took in some fresh air and leaned against the wall. An icy sweat broke out on his forehead. How absurd to be so sensitive and squeamish: over things like one's self too—but with the life out of them! He really must make another

attempt. He mopped his brow and moved towards the door.

Lavis came out, bringing the sour smell with him, and took hold of him.

"Look here," he said, "you'll never make a doctor if you can't stand this. Be scientific, man, and not sentimental. There's nothing to it. 'In the midst of life'—you know. Think of them as *materia medica.* Come and see where we keep them in pickle."

"I couldn't," said Rudd. "It's stupid, I know, but I couldn't. I shall be sick in a minute."

"That's all right," said Lavis. "Be sick. Then you'll have got the first step done."

"You don't understand," said Rudd. "You're elemental. I'm not."

"What did you want me for?" Lavis asked. "I've got to finish that leg before I can have any lunch."

"Nothing," said Rudd.

"Come on, what was it?"

Rudd pushed the paper towards him.

Lavis read it carefully.

"Don't worry any more about dissecting-rooms," he said. "The sooner you chuck medicine, the better. This is your line of country."

"Do you really think so?" Rudd asked.

"Of course. I'd always suspected it; now I know. You're too absent-minded for medicine," Lavis added; "that's another reason. Medicine wants every thought: concentration. But I must finish those blooming muscles. We'll talk about this later."

Rudd went off in triumph: Lavis agreed as to his future. But then came the reaction, for how could he break with medicine? What of his mother: her ambition for him, her sacrifice of personal income for him? His father too? There would be a nice row over that, especially as *The Post-Meridian* was a Tory paper. No, he would have to go through with it, unless—well, unless the miracle in which we all believe in our early years happens, as surely it must soon.

Meanwhile, several times on his way to lunch, and as he waited for lunch, he read the poem again.

At lunch he began to write another set of verses for to-morrow's paper.

This was Thursday. On Saturday night the last post brought a letter which he opened without enthusiasm, but which turned him into a smiling Crœsus. It was from *The Post-Meridian's* manager, who had much pleasure in enclosing a cheque for half a guinea —a beautiful pink slip made out to Rudd Sergison, Esq. The favour of the return of the enclosed receipt was requested.

Half a guinea! This mean that if Rudd got a poem accepted every day, he would make three guineas a week, on which, with his allowance, he could do anything. No more galleries and pits and waiting in queues; he would be able to book a seat. He could dine at Simpson's at least once a week.

But of course a poem a day was a bit stiff. Say four a week; that would be an extra hundred a year.

He could write four a week on his head. He had ideas for two at that moment.

Rudd set the cheque on the mantelpiece near the gas and looked at it from time to time. It was a guarantee of fortune—a lovely mascot.

The next day being Sunday, Rudd was lunching with Uncle Ben, and he showed him the precious document.

"Only half a guinea!" Uncle Ben said.

Rudd had thought it a magnificent sum.

"I should send the next thing to another paper," said Uncle Ben, "and see if they are not more generous."

"I have sent it to *The Post-Meridian* already," said Rudd. "It seemed to me only decent to send it there after taking that other."

"Heavens, boy, don't go about looking for decency. Go to the best market," said Uncle Ben. "What's this?" he added, drawing a white paper from the cheque envelope.

"That's the receipt," said Rudd.

Uncle Ben scrutinized it. "I shouldn't sign any more of these," he said. "It says it is paying you half a guinea for the copyright of the verses. That's not fair. It's only the serial rights that you sell them. Next time cross out 'copyright' and see what happens."

"I shouldn't like to," said Rudd. "It might annoy them, and then they wouldn't take any more verses."

"Nonsense," said Uncle Ben. "Stick up for your rights and they'll respect you. Even fear you."

(But one has to be older than Rudd to accept that.)

"I don't think I shall," said Rudd.

"Then where are you if they like to bring out a collection of *Post-Meridian* verses on their own? And where are you if you want to bring out a collection on your own? You've lost your right to include these."

"I can easily write some more," said Rudd.

CHAPTER XXI

ANOTHER PROOF THAT IT IS NO WOMAN'S BUSINESS TO TAKE AN INTEREST IN HERSELF

IT was at a dance at the home of one of his fellow-students that Rudd met Phyllis Dewsberry.

Rudd was not much of a dancer, and he was glad when, after a few steps, his partner remarked that she would prefer to sit out. Why total strangers should suddenly grasp each other's bodies and twist and twirl about to music, he had never understood; nor would he, he was certain, ever acquire any ease in the performance. Upon the young men to whom evening dress is as comfortable as a sweater, and small talk as easy as the alphabet, and to whom every new step comes naturally, he had ever looked with wonder and admiration, if not with envy.

On realizing that he must not lean in isolation against the wall throughout the evening, although he would willingly have done so, Rudd had asked his friend to introduce him to Phyllis Dewsberry, because he thought her exceedingly pretty, and his friend, as he led him towards her, had recommended her strongly as a girl of independence and humour

who was going on the stage; but now that Rudd was at her side, and bound to exert himself not a little in conversation to atone for his defective gambols, he had more than his usual difficulty in finding anything to say.

She was disconcerting too, for he had not seen any of the plays on which she asked his opinion or read any of the latest novels.

For a while therefore they fell back on the old device of capping the praises of some friend in common, who happened in this case to be their hostess; but the subject of the lateness of the hour cropping up, and Rudd remarking that surely she was not going yet, the fact emerged that Miss Dewsberry, whenever she did go, was going alone. She was one of those who do not believe in escorts.

From this point it was an easy passage to the discussion of Miss Dewsberry's career and strength of character; her life at the dramatic school; her latch-key courage.

Her eyes were violet and large, beneath long lashes, and when she opened them full on Rudd, which she did at judicious intervals, he felt a little dizzy. He was not used to feminine fascination.

She was not, she said, a bit like other girls, and had in fact a great difficulty in finding a girl friend. There was something lacking in women, for her. Her chief friends were men. She found them such good comrades; pronouncing the first syllable to rhyme to "rum" and the second to "mad."

Rudd winced a little, but the eyes atoned for anything.

Having added a few details concerning her address, Miss Dewsberry asked Rudd what he did, and on hearing that he edited *The Scalpel* at the hospital she became more interested. It seemed that St. Stephen's was her dear old Daddy's hospital and *The Scalpel* always amused her.

She had just time to invite Rudd to come to tea one day, or call for her at the dramatic school, when her next partner appeared, with a proprietary air, and led her away; and Rudd escaped from the house.

Rather a conceited creature, he thought, on the whole. Not his sort. Still, she was young and might grow into sense, and she really was very pretty. More than pretty, beautiful.

Three or four afternoons later, having nothing to do and being conscious of loneliness, Rudd called at the Dewsberry house about tea-time. It was in Russell Square; Miss Dewsberry's dear old Daddy, it seemed from the brass plate, still practised.

The servant who opened the door was untidy and the hall was rather shabby. Daddy was doing none too well, Rudd guessed.

Rudd was shown into a back sitting-room crowded with wicker chairs, Liberty stuffs, photographs and Japanese fans. Here were seated Miss Dewsberry at a tiny tea-table, and in arm-chairs two dressy young men who viewed Rudd with ill-concealed resentment.

Each had obviously been trying to sit out the other, and this further competition was too bad.

Miss Dewsberry was all glances and sweetness; indistinct introductions were made; and a desultory conversation, chiefly about plays and players, was resumed.

Both men—Rudd wondered whether they had yet reached the "cumrad" stage—seemed to be actors, or on the way to that goal, and for the first time he heard illustrious ladies of the stage docked of their pretty Christian names and referred to as though they were clerks.

The young man whose name had sounded like Vash said that in the new piece at the Criterion Wyndham had a good part but Moore was badly fitted, while the young man whose name sounded like Towse said that whoever could get Neilson for a leading lady would do well.

Miss Dewsberry made an effort or two to switch the general talk to books, for Rudd's benefit, but in vain, and therefore drew his attention to her little *sanctum sanctorum,* as she called it, and asked if she were not fortunate to be thus situated.

Daddy, she said, was never in to tea; it was his only sure time for billiards at his club; her mother had long been dead.

She had two sisters, but they had their own friends and entertained in another room. For the most part their visitors were women; whereas she herself preferred men. Somehow—she couldn't quite account

for it—men seemed to her more frank and understanding. She did not wish to say a word against women, but for her, men were better companions, even confidants. In short, cumrads.

It was then that Rudd made his first mistake.

"Yes," he said, "you told me that the other evening."

All his life he had difficulty in controlling this habit of remarking on repetition in others.

She punished him by talking exclusively to the two young men for a while.

None the less, when in despair one of the actors rose and took his leave, Rudd remained. He would rather have gone, but missed the moment. It is so easy to do. The other man, looking him over searchingly, decided that the struggle would be too long, and also left.

"I'm glad they've gone," said Miss Dewsberry, relenting. "They're dear good boys, but they can't keep off shop. Two is the perfect number. Now we can talk. Would you mind very much if I were to smoke? I find it soothes my poor nerves."

"I don't care much about seeing women smoke," Rudd replied bluntly.

Miss Dewsberry flushed for a second.

"There you are, you men!" she said. "Always such critics of any kind of feminine courage. And why shouldn't we smoke as much as you?"

"No reason at all," Rudd said, a little surprised at the expression which had passed across her face, "All I said was that I didn't much care about seeing

you do so. One has certain ideals in such matters, and I for one don't think a cigarette makes a pretty woman any prettier."

Miss Dewsberry smiled again, and again turned her violet battery full on him.

"You'll grow out of that," she said.

"I daresay I shall," said Rudd, with a half sigh. "I've grown out of lots of good prejudices already, and fear that too many more will go. But I haven't lost it yet."

"Then I mayn't smoke!" said Miss Dewsberry, opening her eyes quiveringly and pleadingly on his and drooping her mouth.

"Of course you may," said Rudd, lighting a match for her.

"But you'll despise me," she said.

"No," he replied, and knew that an outpost had gone.

She smoked, he noticed, very badly. It was obviously a pose.

"Tell me about your writing," she said, settling down among the "art" cushions. "I love to hear young authors on their plans. I know quite a lot. All such dear boys."

Rudd shivered. What had he let himself in for?

"Oh! I've done nothing," he said. "Nothing but the merest trifles. Skits and that kind of thing."

"But you will," she replied. "You must. I'll tell you what," and she laughed gaily. "You must write a play with a leading part for me. And—a great

idea!—we'll do it together. Won't we?" She put out her hand to clinch the bargain.

Rudd took it, knowing perfectly well that he would do nothing of the kind. It was warm and soft, and he held it a second too long.

"I want an emotional and yet gay part," she continued. "Suitable for an actress who comes halfway between Terry on the one side and Vaughan on the other. That sounds frightfully conceited, I'm afraid, but it was what one of our committee said of me, and I just pass it on for what it's worth. Sheer flattery, of course, but I think I know what he meant. Do you?"

Rudd said that he had never seen Vaughan.

"Well, you've seen Terry, of course?" Miss Dewsberry asked.

Yes, Rudd had seen him.

"I mean Ellen Terry," she said.

Rudd said he had seen her too—several times, but never enough.

Miss Dewsberry turned her profile so that he could examine it well. "Don't you notice a likeness?" she inquired. "There"—she touched her nose—"just there. Isn't that like Terry's? Just a hint? I'm so often told so that I feel there must be something in it."

"Perhaps there is," said Rudd, who was wearying fast. As if a man went to see a woman in order to hear her praise herself!

And yet, such was the effect of the periodical em-

ployment of the violet eyes, before Rudd left it was arranged in some mysterious way, the origin of which he could not afterwards distinctly recall, that on Sunday next he and Miss Dewsberry, who loved long country walks with a nice man friend, should meet at Victoria Station at 9.25 for a day on Leith Hill.

What an ass I am! I shall be bored to death, he thought to himself on the way home. She's a silly creature. Why haven't I more strength of mind? Let's hope it rains.

But Sunday morning broke fine enough, and at 9.15 Rudd was waiting outside Victoria for the lady's cab. She arrived in good time, dressed more for Bond Street than for a country tramp, and Rudd tingled under a flood of irritation. Her skirt was long, and she held it high enough to disclose clocked silk stockings and elegant shoes with soles of the thickness of postage stamps; on her head was a picture hat. Rudd meanwhile was in a very shabby grey flannel, and his plan had been to walk from Holmwood to Guildford!

As the platform loafers turned to look at them he was ashamed and furious. No one, he had always held, should attract attention. The art of dress was to displease no eye and to draw no eye twice.

Miss Dewsberry, however, was all unconscious of the sensation that she caused. She glowed with health and the anticipation of a good day.

With the assistance of Miss Dewsberry's ego, the

theatrical advertisements in the Sunday papers, and a few objects seen from the windows, they conversed until Holmwood, and here Rudd began to feel happier, for the sun was warm, and a sweet south wind blew over the common.

After all, she might be a silly ass, but the day was good, and perhaps they would get through it without trouble, and he would take jolly good care never to repeat such an experiment.

They had some lunch at a cottage at Coldharbour, and were soon on the top of the hill, with the weald beneath them. Guildford had long been given up. They were now to walk back to Dorking through Wootton, but even that would be more than enough for Miss Dewsberry's insane shoes.

It was perfect amid the heather in the sun. Miss Dewsberry took off her picture hat and lay back luxuriously, shading her complexion with her hands. Rudd thought it was very decent of her not to mind crushing her dress in this way. He had feared that any comfortable siesta would be impossible.

For a long while they said nothing. Rudd smoked a pipe blissfully; Miss Dewsberry pondered or dozed.

"I'm beginning to study Juliet this week," she said at last.

Confound the woman! Was this a place, with the sun and the warmth and the heather, to talk about acting?

"Are you?" he replied listlessly. Adding quickly, "Isn't it lovely here?"

"Ah yes!" she said. "I believe I was made for the country," she added. "It's so large and open and splendid; so different from town. I always feel cramped and insincere in town. I should love to act out of doors."

Rudd said nothing. Act out of doors! The vandal!

"I have always been like that," she said. "I have always loved the great silences; the deep secrets of the woods. The country is tonic to me. The funny thing is I think of it almost as a fellow-creature."

Rudd foresaw the worst, and steeled himself grimly.

"Almost a cumrad," she concluded.

"I suppose that's a kind of pantheism," she added, after a few moments.

"I suppose it is," said Rudd.

There was another silence, during which Rudd was ruminating upon how he could decently suggest starting for home.

"I wonder what you see in me?" Miss Dewsberry suddenly remarked, leaning on her elbow and turning her eyes full on him. Rudd had been wondering too. He avoided her eyes, and said nothing.

"I suppose it's the masculine side of me that appeals to you," she continued, all unconscious of his growing distaste and impatience.

"My frankness and acceptance of facts," she went

on. "I expect it's refreshing to you not to be with a woman who is always fishing for compliments and saying insincere things just because she thinks they are the sort of thing that a man likes. Isn't it? I know it's refreshing to me not to have a man dangling round and saying how beautiful my eyes are and idiotic things like that. You're not that sort. You've never even noticed my eyes, I believe. Have you?"

"I shouldn't say that," said Rudd, feeling the liveliest dread of what was to follow, and knowing himself no match for this sort of flank attack.

"I wonder if, without looking, you can say what colour they are?" Miss Dewsberry ruthlessly continued. "They might be green, for all you know. Are they?"

"I—I—well, I'm afraid you've sized me up correctly," said Rudd at last, diplomacy coming slowly to his aid. "The fact is I am so horribly self-centred. I know they're beautiful, of course," he added, as a little kind-hearted sop.

The "of course" was a mistake. Miss Dewsberry was vexed.

"Then, tell me why—what interests me" (she amended the abrupt opening) "is the question, What brought us here together? What was it in me that led you to choose me so swiftly for a cumrad?"

Rudd could easily have strangled her.

Instead he temporized. "Tell me what you found companionable in me?" he said.

"Oh, no," she replied. "Play fair. I asked you first."

Rudd was in despair. There was nothing in her that attracted him any more, and he would rather die than confess now that once it was her eyes.

"Really," he said, "I—I——"

"Yes," said Miss Dewsberry.

"It's too difficult," he said. "This kind of thing is made up of so much vagueness that words don't seem any use . . ."

Miss Dewsberry said nothing for a while. Then she rose and dusted herself and put on her hat.

"I think we had better be getting on," she said.

They returned to town practically in silence.

CHAPTER XXII

RUDD MEETS HIS FATE

NO sooner did Rudd see Mr. Luard, the editor of *The Post-Meridian,* than he felt his spell. As a matter of fact, so did most young men, and many older ones too.

The editor was sitting at his desk smoking a long and very strong cigar. He was thin and tall, with hair turning grey above a finely proportioned forehead. He was not what the Americans call a "high-brow," but it was such a forehead as often goes with men of swift intelligence. It was very white.

Beneath it were two keen, quick eyes and a thin aquiline nose. The eyes and the forehead were slightly at variance: the eyes had mischief in them, the forehead seemed to be the abode of clear thinking and benevolence. Around Luard's mouth a quizzical smile eternally played, but you could not see his lips clearly because of his iron-grey moustache.

As a whole it was a face keenly alert rather than sympathetic. You could imagine destructive comments proceeding from those lips. Most of all it con-

veyed the impression that Luard's true place was in a comfortable stall at the comedy of life.

He was perhaps forty-three, but looked older. This was partly because of a rooted reluctance to do anything so banal as to go to bed. He was always the last up at night, but nine o'clock found him at the office as though he had slept like a child. He lived principally on strong cigars.

Why he edited this or any paper, no one knew, for he had ample private means, and was a bachelor and fond of impulsive travel. Yet here, for the moment, he was, a divine amateur (as some one once called him), and the paper betrayed his presence, for every one was a few per cent. above himself with this influence in the place, while into most of the literary articles Luard dropped a few sparkling sentences which otherwise would never have been there. His erudition was remarkable, and no one could ever forget the occasion when he came in on the morning after the Westminster Play with the epilogue translated in full into heroic couplets, a trifling task of the small hours.

It is necessary only to add that Luard dressed as a country gentleman who frequented the best tailor, and there he is.

"How are you?" he said to Rudd. "Glad you were able to come. Have a cigar."

Rudd was fascinated by him. This was his first editor, and how different from what he had expected!

What that was he could hardly have said, but cuff-protectors came into it.

Luard asked Rudd a few questions as to his plans. "Don't let me unsettle you," he said, "but of course you've got the knack. You would be useful in an office. Here, for example, there are lots of things you could do. We rather cultivate the light side. But if you're going to be a sawbones you must stay there, of course. No sense in pitching all those fees to the dickens."

Rudd said he was certainly in for medicine, but he was rapidly receding from it.

"Of course there's a lot of disillusion about journalism," said Luard, "but it's a lark too; otherwise I shouldn't be in it, I can promise you. Fleet Street has most of the romance nowadays. If you decided to chuck medicine, and you cared for my advice, it would be to act as a reporter for a year or two. They have the fun! Hang about with a receptive mind ready for anything, and go off like an arrow when your instructions are given you. That's the game. It's almost knight-errantry: knight-errantry with a microscope! But I expect you're rather past it. You've begun to write, and few reporters ever do that."

Rudd kindled to this talk. Luard was not an enthusiast: his nature was ironical; but his words had the effect of enthusiasm on his listener. Rudd would never make much of a doctor; of that he had been

dimly certain for some time. Now he knew it absolutely.

He looked round the room. Everything fascinated him. Luard first of all; Luard's clothes; his huge generous cigar-case, like a valise, on the desk; the great scissors; the blue pencil; the mass of proofs; the papers scattered everywhere; the piles of books for review on another table.

Suddenly a head appeared at a side door.

"Sorry," said the head, "I thought you were alone."

"I shall be free directly," said Luard.

"Come and have a hundred up."

"Most assuredly," said Luard.

The head disappeared, and Luard turned again to Rudd; but another door opened; and a grimy artisan entered, with a long slip in his hand.

"Well, Jack, what is it?" Luard asked.

"This 'ere," said Jack.

"What about it?" Luard asked.

"Nothing," said Jack, who was very throaty and brusque and had all the appearance of being blind. "Nothing. Only libel."

"Let me see it," said Luard, and ran his bright keen eyes down the lines.

"You're right," he said. "Who sent it up?"

"The Boss," said Jack.

"Good," said Luard. "He shall hear of it in the morning. Here, have a drink," and he presented Jack with half a crown.

Jack shambled out.

"That's the real editor," said Luard. "The head printer. If this had got in it would have cost us a couple of thousand. That's the worst of amateur proprietors. Well, don't forget what I've said. By the way," he added, "have you any particular line?"

"Not that I know of," said Rudd.

"That's a pity," Luard remarked. "The good journalist knows something about everything, and everything about something. At least that used to be the rule. Never mind, there's no vacancy just now," he added, perhaps conscious that it was hardly the game to deprive Æsculapius of such a lieutenant. "But if any were to occur may I send you word?"

Rudd assured him most cordially that he might.

"Meanwhile let me have something now and then. I hope they're paying you all right? We're a mean lot here."

Rudd said that he thought the payment was splendid.

"You won't think so long," said Luard. "Goodbye."

He accompanied Rudd to the door and shook his hand warmly.

Rudd descended the stairs conscious that there was nothing he would not do for that man: conscious also that this was the life for him.

He returned in the depths to the Hospital. That journalism was his destiny, he knew, but it would distress his mother, the strength of whose desire to see him a healer of men was only equalled by the thor-

oughness with which she detested daily papers and all their sensationalism. The evening papers especially, with their steady passion for winners; and betting the curse of the country.

Rudd took his perplexities to Uncle Ben.

"Well," said Uncle Ben when Rudd had finished, "what do you want? Why do you come to me?"

"I want advice," said Rudd.

"Rubbish," said Uncle Ben. "You don't want advice—you want support in a line you have decided upon."

"But what about mother?" Rudd asked. "She'll be so disappointed, and it was her money too."

"You can't help that," said Uncle Ben. "There's been a mistake; don't make it worse by being too weak to stop it."

"You really think I ought to chuck medicine?" Rudd exclaimed in delighted surprise.

"Of course," said Uncle Ben. "There's no question about it. But we must be a little gradual. When do the holidays begin?"

Rudd told him.

"Very well, then, tell your friend Luard that you will be free on that date, and tell your mother that you have accepted a holiday task and are earning a little money. By the end of the holidays, if you keep her informed as to your progress and so on, she will be prepared for you to continue in the new line altogether. At any rate the shock won't be so severe."

"What a brick you are!" Rudd said.

"We're always bricks when our advice chimes with the wishes of those who want it," Uncle Ben replied. "That's easy. The difficulty is to be thought a brick when one gives unpopular counsel."

But fate, as it happened, was more of a brick even than Uncle Ben.

Thus. Luard had an elderly father. This father, who had long been in poor health, died unexpectedly. Luard was called away, and his place of editor taken by some one under him, a promotion which made a vacancy in the writing department. Luard had but an hour or so to arrange about these displacements, and one of his telegrams was to Rudd.

"If you could possibly manage to be at the office at nine o'clock to-morrow morning, it would be a great help to us in an emergency," he telegraphed.

There was but a month of the term to go, and Rudd did not hesitate in writing the reply: "Expect me at nine."

He slept little that night for fear of being late. The next morning he went to the office, expecting to stay, if at all, for a fortnight. He remained for seven years.

CHAPTER XXIII

RUDD VISITS OLYMPUS

WALKING up Fleet Street one morning, Rudd ran into Phil Bendy, whom he had not seen since he left school. Now, though not more than six or seven years older, Bendy was a raffish Bohemian, with a cloak over his shoulder instead of a coat, and a sombrero. He resembled, in fact, a stage poet, and attracted amused eyes.

In an adjacent bar Phil told his story. He was a journalist and a dramatist; he had already had two plays accepted for provincial production, and not a few well-known actors and actresses were his friends. He also knew some eminent writers, and he reeled off their names and foibles with a familiarity which made Rudd, who had merely read their books, gasp. Why should Bendy have been admitted to such terms of intimacy? What could they see in him?

Rudd expressed the wish that he, too, might be an observer, however unobserved and silent, of literary eminence and in particular of the great Voaden, the author of *Night and the Stars.*

Phil replied that as it chanced nothing was easier.

"Come as my guest," he said, "to the next dinner of the Vagrants and you'll see Voaden. He's the guest of the evening. Every one will be there."

Rudd accepted.

"You'll have to belong," Phil continued. "It's jolly useful, I can tell you. There are lots of men there who can help you."

"I don't see why they should help me, a perfect stranger, who has done nothing," Rudd replied.

"Yes, they will, if you make up to them," said Phil.

"I don't think I shall do that," said Rudd, "but I'd like to see it once, anyway"; and so it was arranged.

This club, which was famous among the literary dining societies of London, met periodically in a large room in one of the great middle-class restaurants, ate, drank, talked and made speeches.

For the dinner itself Rudd cared nothing. It was indifferent and scramblingly served, and since Bendy devoted himself to some distinguished luminary on his left and Rudd's right-hand partner had neighbouring friends, he was left to himself and to the private identification of the company by means of a printed chart.

Of course he sought first for Voaden, and was pleased with his appearance. He looked quiet and strong.

Then he fixed the others one by one and had the usual shocks. Why we should always anticipate such beauty in the literary physiognomy is a marvel; but

a greater marvel is our reluctance to relinquish that expectation.

"So that's Guildford, is it?" he muttered, after carefully counting the seats from the chairman to be sure of being right. Guildford was one of the first poets of the day and as different as Rudd could imagine from the full-faced gourmand who was eating with anxious energy.

Journalists, authors, artists, agents and publishers formed the company, with a few distinguished and humble guests scattered among them. It was a representative literary gathering, and yet had blind Samson been led in, and bent his shoulders to the repetition of his great coup, London would have gone on very much the same as before. A few men lower in the scale would have been pushed up to fill vacancies, but the public might never have suspected the change. The little men would appear to have become bigger: that is all. Many men are second rate till somebody dies.

After dinner there were speeches. First the health of the guest, which was rather fulsomely proposed by one who had been host on these occasions so often that he had become an expert at the game. Voaden replied with simple cordiality.

Other speeches followed, mainly facetious and in the Cockney accent at that time affected by humorists; and lastly the toast of the guests was given, a list of the more distinguished ones being read out together with the names of the members who had been for-

tunate enough to land such valuable prizes. Rudd, to his immense relief, was not mentioned.

Bendy did not speak, but he spent much time in moving about the room, and now and then brought some one over to Rudd to be introduced, whispering to Rudd in what way this or that man was eminent and likely to be of service.

"My friend Sergison," Bendy called Rudd, adding all kinds of not too scrupulously exact embroideries, such as "assistant editor of the *Post-Meridian,*" "the man who does all the best things in the *Post-Meridian,*" and so forth. At first Rudd denied these compliments—for one prefers that praise of oneself, however warm, should be well-founded—but after a while he let them go. Not because he was reconciled to accepting their unveracity, but because he realized that Bendy's ways were known.

"Come along," said Bendy as the company began to disperse, "we're going round to Gard's rooms. I've fixed it up. Voaden will be there, and you'll have a chance of speaking to him."

"Who is Gard?" Rudd asked.

"Gard? I say, Standish," said Bendy, turning to a big man in a black beard who was at his side, "my friend here wants to know who Gard is. That's good, isn't it?"

The big man looked at Rudd as though he were a new species of animal. "Gard," he said, "can be described in a moment. Gard is the most useful little beast in England."

"I must remember that," said Bendy.

"You're sure to," said the big man with a caustic laugh. "The only part of it that you'll forget is the authorship. Give me a royalty on it anyway."

"We're going round to Gard's now," said Bendy; "are you coming?"

"Of course," said the big man. "By the way, I think I could improve on that definition. Make it, The most useful worm in Europe."

"Much better," said Bendy. "But come along."

Rudd had yet to learn that it is no essential part of a literary man's scheme of life to hold a brief for his host.

He was rather tired of the whole evening and drew back.

"Come along," said Bendy.

"But I don't know Gard," said Rudd, "and from what you've said I don't much want to."

"You'd much better," Bendy urged. "I know him well enough, and you're with me. Besides, Voaden's going."

Rudd did not care for the arrangement; but he wanted to be nearer Voaden, and so he allowed himself to drift, and in twos and threes the party walked to Gray's Inn, where Gard lived.

After climbing many rickety uncarpeted wooden stairs, they entered a comfortable but stuffy flat, the walls of which were invisible beneath either books or pictures. All the furniture, except the chairs, was littered with signed photographs. Every writing man

of mark seemed to have given Gard his portrait with an affectionate inscription.

Whisky and a number of siphons stood on a side table; cigarettes soon turned the air grey; and Rudd, feeling himself utterly an impostor and intruder, made a solitary tour of the walls while the others talked, Voaden being the centre.

The pictures were chiefly engravings and etchings by Piranesi, Whistler, Haden, Rembrandt, Méryon, with a sprinkling of French coloured prints after Steinlen, Forain and Willette. The books were largely French novels and presentation English copies. Rudd took down one or two. "To my dear old Victor"; "Dear Victor, this is my best book and the first copy is for you"; "To Victor Gard with the author's sincere thanks"—such were the inscriptions. What there was about his unknown host to inspire such warm feelings, Rudd could not guess, nor was it ever explained, save by a certain facile gratitude in the literary mind when taken somewhat unawares: a consciousness that ink is thicker than water. For all that anyone could discover of Gard's helpfulness was rather shameless logrolling and the speedy information to the logrolled that Gard's was the hand that had done the service. Be that as it may, he sunned himself in the midst of these visible tokens of his power and utility, and every morning the postman brought another.

Having at length spoken to all his important guests, Gard, who in spite of his flunkeyism had a genuine

sense of hospitality, approached Rudd, inquired as to the success of his last book and informed him that he was drinking nothing. Rudd explained who he was, and was warmly shaken by the hand and made welcome to "Poets' Corner," as Gard called it, varying that phrase with "Open House" and rather hoping for some reference from Rudd to "Garde joyeuse" or "Guard of Honour," even although Bendy had been overdoing such quips, but not getting it.

At this point Rudd, being again left in the isolation due to one who had not yet written a book, ceased to prowl, and found an obscure seat in which to listen to the feast of reason and flow of soul.

Arthur Blampey, who had been pointed out to Rudd at the dinner, the author of the famous farce *Crossed Checks,* having obtained silence, proceeded to tell a story which, if we all wore no clothes and took natural functions for granted, would not have been in the least funny, but under the present scheme of civilization was convulsing. Gard was then reminded of something similar; and then Bendy; and so on until the room was in a roar.

Rudd, being a medical student as well as a man, naturally was not a stranger to such humour, but took no part, having himself none of the powers of a raconteur (in which, to be exact, some other of the narrators were not strong), while he had always been more interested in facts than stories. What was surprising him was that such a party as the present differed no whit, in their mirth, from a company of clerks or com-

mercial travellers; and also that men of such true talents should have such abundant repertories and be so happy in emptying them. Even his special hero Voaden contributed one anecdote, but Rudd called to his aid the memory of the grosser jests of Shakespeare and forgave him.

Voaden, rising from his seat and drifting round the walls, came a little later to Rudd's remote chair.

"And what do *you* write?" he asked in pleasant half-ironical tones.

Rudd tremblingly replied that beyond journalism he had done nothing—that is, in print. Not yet, but——

"Then you're here under false pretences," said Voaden. "Don't let our host know that or he'll send for the police." He laughed.

"I was brought," Rudd explained.

"I know it," said Voaden. "So was I. Terrible places these. Nothing but talk, talk, talk—the curse of London."

Rudd wondered why then he came, having still to learn that literary men spend a great part of their lives in bearing such crosses.

The great man sat down. "You want to write books?" he said. "Then I suppose you will. But it is a pity to give up other work unless you feel absolutely driven to. You'll get so tired of yourself, for one thing; always turning it into copy. But if I can help you, let me. Send me some of your things. Re-

member now, I mean it. Send them to my club, the Garrick."

Rudd flushed and promised.

"Let me see," said Voaden, "I haven't got your name."

Rudd wrote down his name and address.

"Rudd Sergison," said Voaden. "Not bad for a title-page. You know mine perhaps?"

"Mr. Voaden," said Rudd.

"No: Voaden. No Mister-y among fellow-artists," he replied. "Don't forget that. Good night. I've had enough for one evening."

Rudd also left and walked home, meditating on the likeness between great men and smaller men.

CHAPTER XXIV

SURNAME ONLY

RUDD was glad to be alone; he had had more than enough of Bendy.

Bendy was glad to stay on and improve the occasion. He did not often get inside men's rooms, although he had walked to their doors with any number.

Rudd also wished to think over the evening. He had enjoyed it but little. The dinner was poor; the oratory was thin or conceited; his heroes had disappointed him, and he was not wholly happy about his unwarranted invasion of Gard's rooms, little thruster as he knew Gard to be.

But there was always Mr. Voaden's friendliness to remember with pleasure. Mr. Voaden might have been slightly more seasoned than he had wanted to find him: just a little hard-bitten; but probably that was the price of knowing so much about the machinery of human nature.

Rudd would have liked to have posted some manuscripts to Mr. Voaden that very night, but it would be a little too swift. Better wait till to-morrow. Besides, there was a difficulty.

The difficulty had not disappeared the next morning when Rudd awoke, and he carried it about with him most of the day. And then, when evening came, and he pulled out his little collection of manuscripts and went through them to see what would be best to submit to the great man, the difficulty loomed larger than ever.

Having at last made his choice (and he had better have sent all) Rudd set his teeth and attacked it. In other words, he took a sheet of paper to write the letter to accompany them, and in writing it to begin it on equal terms! That was the rub—equal terms! Try as he might Rudd could not cut out the "Mr.": could not write "Dear Voaden."

Yet the Mr. had been meticulously forbidden, "Literature is a fellowship," Mr. Voaden had again said on the stairs. "There should be no Mister-y in a trade union. Do you understand?" And Rudd had murmured something which might have been acquiescence.

And now the Mr. was a tyrant. "Dear Mr. Voaden," "My dear Mr. Voaden": it insisted upon being there. Again and again Rudd strove seriously to omit it, but always he failed. His pen kicked and refused.

And then when at last, as an experiment, he brought himself to write it, just on an odd sheet of paper, he was overcome with shame at the result. "My dear Voaden"—how could a youngster like himself address the author of *The Sea and the Stars* with such effrontery? Perhaps "Dear Voaden," without the patroniz-

ing possessive "My," would be more natural, less monstrous. But no, that looked almost worse. And yet he had been told to send the things and commanded to adopt a familiar form.

Rudd tried again and again, and at last evolved this compromise:

"My dear Mr. Voaden (I am very sorry but I find it impossible to leave out the Mr.),—Here are a few of the MSS. which you so kindly offered to look at.

"With very many thanks for your kindness to me,

"I am,

"Yours sincerely,

"Rudd Sergison."

This letter he put into the big envelope, and then discovered that he had no stamps.

In any outlying part of London, when you are without stamps late at night, there is only one thing to do; and that is to go to a public-house, order something to drink, and ask to be obliged in your difficulty. On the Continent they have the excellent and on the face of it not immoral custom of permitting tobacconists' shops to serve as sumptuary post-offices, a system that greatly simplifies life; but the English have yet to learn to be thus sensible. On the other hand, with an eye perhaps to correcting the embarrassments caused by the Postmaster-General's want of enterprise, the licensing authorities had been very generous in the supply of public-houses in the neighbourhood of

Rudd's rooms, so that he had plenty to choose from when an unstamped envelope forced thirst upon him.

It often happens that the first public-house having no stamps, one must go to another, and even another; and this was Rudd's uncomfortable experience on that eventful night. Not that he had any objection to public-houses when he was with a friend; but he had not yet learned to face alone a barmaid with the assurance that is one of the most admired traits of the perfect Londoner. Barmaids terrified Rudd, as, most of his life, he was terrified by the articulate and confident. In return he treated them as something more than ladies.

Three glasses of bitter beer was it necessary for Rudd to consume on this occasion before he could get the three penny stamps that his precious package seemed to demand. By this time he was a different Rudd from that who had written the apologetic letter. The national beverage had made him strong.

Hurrying home, for it was nearing midnight, at which hour his nearest box was cleared, he tore up the first letter and in a bold hand wrote another one. "My dear Voaden," he began without a tremor, and rattled on to the end in the same fine free way. This he hastened to post and was soon in bed and asleep.

He awoke next morning horror-struck at what he had done; but he had done it. There was no going back now. The great author of *The Sea and the Stars* had lost his Mr.

And yet had he? Rudd shivered as he remembered

that it is one thing to write "Voaden" so familiarly, and another to say it. No stimulant could becomingly help him there; and the day would surely come when he would have to face that ordeal.

He dressed in perplexity. What difficulties life presents!

CHAPTER XXV

IN WHICH THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS MORE THAN ONCE

RUDD was shown into Voaden's drawing-room, where Mrs. Voaden sat alone by the fire. She was occupied with some form of embroidery.

Mrs. Voaden was a large lady, with a placid humorous face, and she instantly made her guest at home. Her husband would be down directly, she said. He was always late. It was a habit with most men, and would continue to be until they tried their hands at cooking the dinner themselves, and took pride in having it ready to time, and then saw unpunctuality spoiling it. Still, clever people must be forgiven, she supposed. Her husband, at any rate, always expected to be forgiven, and often was. Novelists demanded preferential treatment and possibly deserved it, since it was their mission to beguile poor human nature and take people out of themselves. Anyway, whether they deserved it or not, they usually got it, in a way that grocers and bakers and artisans—the really useful fellows—did not.

So she ran on, half ironically, her busy fingers stitching the while.

It was a comfortable room, with a bright fire and plenty of easy-chairs and a few good water-colours. A portrait of Voaden, by some dashing new Gallicized hand, was over the mantelpiece. Rudd leaned back and listened luxuriously to this clever lady, who seemed at once to be so shrewdly outside the game and yet in it too.

What, she asked, was Rudd's particular ambition as a writer? She had seen some of his things—her husband had shown them to her, as he always did—and they were rather good, she thought, but lacking in courage. Rudd, she felt, should go more directly to life and not wear blinkers so steadily. Blinkers were a mistake. No need to tell everything; but one should be aware of it. She didn't want him to be another Zola, but his avoidance of facts was against his work. "But then you're so young," she said.

Rudd listened in a state of rapture. Her censure mattered nothing; the delight was to be criticized and discussed by a wise woman of the world, such as this, at once so kind and so searching and the wife of the great Voaden.

"The point is," she continued, "what do you want to be? Do you want to be a novelist?"

Rudd thought that he did, some day, but he seemed incapable now of any but short flights.

"You haven't any very strong ambition?" she asked.

He thought not. That was one of his great defects.

"It may come," she replied. "You look like developing late. It seems to me that what you want to do now is not to write at all, but observe and collect. You're at a hospital, aren't you?"

Rudd said that he was—at St. Stephen's.

"Then what a chance you have!" she replied. "Experience washing right up to your feet, day and night. If you take my advice, you won't worry about your writing at all, but be thorough in your living."

What magnificent counsel! thought Rudd.

"But of course my husband may tell you differently, and he knows better than I do," she said.

Not he, thought Rudd, and at this moment Voaden entered full of apologies, and dinner soon began.

Voaden and Rudd drank claret; Mrs. Voaden water. She was at least ten years older than her husband, Rudd guessed, and his attitude to her was very pretty and amusing—half solicitude and half gentle chaff. He called her Sheila.

The talk was mainly literary, and a great many authors were passed under review. Rudd observed that Mrs. Voaden's estimate often differed totally from her husband's, and that to this Voaden had no objection. They agreed to differ. Brought up, as Rudd had been, in a house where the only opinion was the male one, this new situation filled him with surprise. Not only was Voaden not angry about it at the table, but there were no signs that he would be angry afterwards, in private, when such differences are usually settled. How odd it all was!

Mrs. Voaden left them to their cigars, and it was then that Voaden turned to Rudd's manuscripts and said a little about them. But it was very obvious that they had not made any impression upon him, and his encouragement was perfunctory. Rudd did not mind: he had a friend with insight and sympathy in the next room.

"But writing's a dog's life anyway," said Voaden. "Plucking one's heart-strings, day and night, for money. I advise no one to take it unless he has private means, or some trick at the drama to make his real money easily. Write, by all means, but do something else as well. Be a doctor, and write in your leisure."

Rudd felt that Voaden meant to be kind, and was kind, but evidently he had something on his mind—probably the book on which he was at work—and could give Rudd only divided attention. Still, it was awfully decent of him to have asked to see the things at all and to have invited him to dinner. Rudd was not disappointed in the least.

Excusing himself on the plea of having letters to answer, Voaden left Rudd alone with Sheila, and they had a long talk. She said very little about herself, but drew from Rudd a thousand details of his life; and since all men, not only the youngest, like to be coaxed by a woman into autobiography, Rudd was very happy.

He came away filled with enthusiasm for a life of close imaginative observation and experimentalism, and then, a thousand or so years hence, when he was

middle-aged, he would write such books about it all!

"Every Sunday night," Mrs. Voaden had said, "we have open house from about half-past eight onwards. My husband likes to talk and hear talk, and as he is so busy it is his only chance of meeting many of his friends. Won't you come? You will find some lions, but you needn't roar yourself. You can sit in a corner with me."

The next Sunday evening, therefore, Rudd made his way again to Hampstead and was shown into a house crowded with men and women, all roaring. For some time he was unable to reach his host or hostess and quite unable then to do more than shake their hands. It was all rather disconcerting, especially as he had in mind Mrs. Voaden's promise of another talk in a corner. But his reward came, for the evening having passed somehow, and all the guests having gone but two or three who were with Voaden in his study, Rudd settled down by the fire with Mrs. Voaden; and she asked him to tell her all that he had been doing.

He ought to have seen that she was very tired, but he was not yet old enough to know that the second duty of a guest is to leave early (the first being to arrive punctually); and she was too kind to bid him go.

He was in the midst of an account of some trivial adventure when the other remaining guests came in to say good night.

Voaden accompanied them to the gate to whistle for a cab.

"I wish you would see that he has his hat on," said Mrs. Voaden; "he catches cold so easily."

Rudd went out for that purpose, and noticing that Voaden was properly protected, returned, just in time to see his hostess hurriedly half fill a tumbler with whisky and drain it.

For the moment he did not quite realize what this meant, or he would have stepped aside and waited so as not to be seen; but the full force of it came upon him when he observed the odd expression on Mrs. Voaden's face as she put her finger to her lips to enjoin secrecy. She laughed, too—a foolish, self-conscious laugh.

Rudd felt hot and ashamed. He had discovered a streak of clay in his idol. How he wished Voaden would come back and let him get away before she began to lose more dignity.

Rudd had been brought up a strict teetotaller, and though he was so no longer he still retained much of his early attitude of horror not only to drunkenness but even to drink. For a woman to take too much was always the unpardonable offence; while to take any, except at meals, was strange and disquieting. All drunkards were terrible people, to be avoided and condemned; but a woman . . . !

He said nothing, but stood stupidly silent while Mrs. Voaden was rapidly passing under the influence of the neat spirit.

Voaden returning saw the situation in a moment. He glanced at Rudd and the tumbler, and walking to his wife he offered her his arm.

"Bedtime, I think," he said gaily. "You're tired, dear. She's had a long evening," he explained to Rudd.

But Mrs. Voaden was not amenable. She denied the tiredness, and only after much persuasion was she got out of the room, Rudd having to assist physically. The thought that he should ever be grasping an inert arm of this gifted lady and helping to get her to her room like a sack of coals!

Returning alone, he stood by the fire perplexed and abashed. What a tragedy for Voaden, he thought. And who would have dreamed it? No wonder there was that abstracted air about Voaden, with this horror always hanging over him. How little we know of anyone. What would be done? he wondered. Would Mrs. Voaden be sent away? There were homes for dipsomaniacs—would she be sent to one of those? And again he thought what a tragedy for Voaden! For himself too in a way, for he had been anticipating so much pleasure and profit from visits to this wise lady. But now, of course, she would never want him to see her again.

And how strange to have drink accessible when one was like that! Surely the right thing to do was to remove temptation. In Voaden's place Rudd would be a teetotaller.

He wondered if he ought to go, but decided it

would be kinder to stay and wring Voaden's hand just to show how sorry he was for him and how he understood. And yet probably Voaden would hate to meet any eye to-night, with this shame upon him —poor broken fellow. It would be kinder to go.

Rudd was creeping out to get his hat and coat when Voaden came briskly in, mixed himself a glass of whisky and soda and offered Rudd one.

"Well," he said, laughing, "to think that you should have met the skeleton in the cupboard as quickly as that! Poor Sheila!" he went on, "she's been so good for such a long time, but I suppose she couldn't resist it this evening. It was when I went out, I suppose. I oughtn't to have gone. Poor old girl. She's such a brick to me. I don't believe there's a finer woman in the world, and true as steel. The only mistakes I've made were when I didn't take her advice. She's always right. If only she'd stick to wine I shouldn't mind, but spirits are bad for her. Poor old girl! Well, here's luck."

Voaden accompanied Rudd to the gate. "Come again soon," he said. "Sheila's taken quite a fancy to you. Come next Sunday, at any rate; but come to dinner too. Good night."

Come again! Had Rudd heard aright? Truly he was in a strange world.

CHAPTER XXVI

PITY'S BILL COMES IN

RUDD, having been calling on Mrs. Voaden at Hampstead, was walking down Fitzjohn's Avenue a little before seven, on his way to Swiss Cottage station, when a few yards ahead of him, through the dusk, he noticed a girl come out of the gate of one of the large houses and stand irresolute on the pavement, looking this way and that in dismal perplexity.

She was slight and graceful, and Rudd stopped to light a cigarette in order to observe her more closely.

After a few moments' more irresolution, she made a little after-all-what-does-it-matter? gesture and began to descend the hill with listless steps.

Rudd saw the whole thing in a flash. Her hat told him that she was a servant, and he realized that she was probably from the country, that this was her evening out, and she had nowhere to go and no one to go with. A wave of pity for her and all her class thus stranded swept over him and in a moment he was at her side.

"Excuse me," he said, joining her and taking off his hat.

She turned a half-alarmed wistful little face towards him.

"Yes," she gasped, "what is it?"

"Please don't be frightened," Rudd said, "please don't; but—could I do anything for you?"

"No, no," the girl hurriedly replied. "Why should you?" she added.

"Well," said Rudd, "I don't know why, but I was afraid you're not very happy and I thought perhaps you would let me look after you a little."

She drew back. Old stories of London and its wicked ways were crowding into her memory.

"Please don't be frightened," he repeated. "I'll go right away at once if you wish it. Only I had a sort of idea that you had the whole evening in front of you and didn't know how to spend it."

She looked at him in surprise. "How did you know?" she asked.

"I just guessed it," he said, "and I thought perhaps you might care to go to a music-hall or theatre. . . . I'm free too, you see. But I'm frightening you. It's all right, I'll go on. Good night."

"Oh, no," said the girl. "You're very kind," she added. "Are you sure you only guessed it?"

She looked at him searchingly and he was aware of pure grey troubled eyes of liquid candour.

"Honour bright," Rudd said. "It wasn't so very difficult. You looked a little as though you were from

the country and lost in London, you know. Now, then, is it a bargain? Shall I take care of you just for this evening?"

"But you're a gentleman," she said simply.

"I hope so," said Rudd.

"And I'm only a servant," she added.

"Oh," said Rudd, who had not quite taken her meaning and always hated class distinctions, "if it comes to that, we're all servants. I know *I* am. I have to begin work at nine every morning. But this evening I'm free, and I know so well what it is to be lonely in London. I'm from the country too. But look here. I know what you thought, for a moment at any rate. You thought I was one of those swine who walk about waiting to find girls alone. To prove I'm not and merely felt an impulse to try and make you a little happier, here's five shillings. Do take it, like a good girl, and go to a pit somewhere, and I'll run on."

"Oh no, I couldn't," said the girl; "I can't go to plays alone. I don't care for them alone. Besides I have to be in by ten."

"Very well, then," said Rudd, "let me look after you till ten."

And the girl prettily acquiesced.

No sooner had she done so than he wondered why on earth he had been so foolish as to speak to her at all, but having now begun he continued.

They got on a bus at Swiss Cottage and bowled

down to Baker Street, talking with some difficulty the while.

The girl's name was Rose. She came from Norwich and had been in her present place only three weeks. She had an attractive East Anglian accent.

Rudd was wondering where he could possibly take her, for the necessity of her early return put any play out of the question, and a music-hall seemed rather silly, for this was before the days of the two-performances-a-night system, and the convenient cinema was not yet. And then he caught sight of Madame Tussaud's and proposed that.

"Oh yes," Rose said, "I've always heard about Madame Tussaud's. I'd like to go there."

They went first to a little Italian restaurant close by, in Baker Street; but the meal was a failure, for Rose refused to drink anything, either from the vestiges of suspicion or because she was a teetotaller, and Rudd, who wished himself miles distant, had difficulty in knowing what to say. Norwich was useful for a few minutes, as he had once been there for an afternoon; but the Norwich which interested him—the Norwich, that is, of Borrow—did not exist for her. They met however on common ground in the Cathedral and its Close and again in the market-place; but there parted once more.

Of books she knew nothing and he did not like to ask her much about her present employers; but she talked freely of her family, her married sisters and so forth.

"What would you have done if I hadn't been so rude and spoken to you?" Rudd asked.

"You weren't rude," she said, "you were very kind. I don't know why you should be so kind. I should have walked about, and looked in the shops in the Edgware Road, and bought some sweets, and then have walked back again."

"You must make some friends," Rudd said.

"I expect I shall in time," she replied.

"But how dull for you," he said, "until you do!"

"It's all right," she said simply, and again, young as he was, he marvelled at the calm acquiescence in monotony that women can display.

At Madame Tussaud's they got on better. Here Rose quickly showed signs of animation. The great brightly lit galleries, the handsome costumes, the imposing personages counterfeited—all these delighted her.

"Isn't it wonderful?" she said again and again. "Fancy being among all these kings and queens and grand people!"

Before the Sleeping Beauty she gripped Rudd in a moment of excitement at the marvel of mechanical respiration, and after that he held her arm as he piloted her from one figure to another and explained who they were.

"That's President Carnot," he said, and related the circumstances of his assassination.

"They're all murdered, French Presidents, aren't they?" Rose asked.

Royalties pleased her most, and she would have given Tennyson in his study no second glance but for hearing that he also was an East Anglian.

"Born at Somersby, was he?" she exclaimed. "Why, that's where my Aunt Clara used to live," and she returned and studied the poet's lineaments.

"Isn't it extraordinary?" she said again and again. "Fancy Aunt Clara belonging to the same place? I shan't forget that in a hurry."

Poor Sala might never have existed.

Rudd was not bored now. He was not only conscious of amusement in thus introducing a country girl to the celebrities of the world, but furthermore he saw an article in it; for it was his first visit to the waxworks too. The evening was not wholly thrown away.

On each of the statesmen, soldiers, orators, Rudd said a few words.

"What a lot you know!" Rose exclaimed.

What a lot any of us can know, Rudd thought, if we are in the right company.

"Not really," he said aloud.

"Oh yes. You're clever!" Rose replied. "You're not in a shop, I'm sure."

"No," said Rudd, "not exactly."

"Tell me what you do," Rose said.

Rudd told her that he was a journalist, and he had to name the paper, so that, should she ever require one, she might buy that.

"Is your name put to what you write?" she asked.

"No," said Rudd, but he had to say what it was, none the less.

In the Chamber of Horrors she was wide-eyed and a little clinging; and then apologetic. Details of the French Revolution impressed her shudderingly; she had never heard them before; but she could tell Rudd more about one or two of our native murderers than he knew.

"Well," said Rudd as they drew near the house in Fitzjohn's Avenue, "have you had a pleasant evening?"

"Very," she replied.

"And I wasn't a monster after all! Still," he added, "you must be careful of strange men in the streets, you know."

"I know," she said. "I think," she went on when they were fifty yards from her gate, you had better leave me here."

"Very well," said Rudd, putting out his hand, "Good night."

Rose looked at him shyly, with the ghost of an invitation in her little white face.

Rudd's heart beat faster but he did not move.

Rose took his hand and shook it limply.

"Good night," she said, "and thank you," and she moved off.

I wonder if she wanted me to kiss her, Rudd thought as he descended the hill. I wonder if she expected it. I wish I knew more about them.

I'm glad I didn't kiss her, he thought later. That

would have made him just like the others. It wouldn't have been playing the game.

I did play the game, he assured himself. Yet he had held her arm in Madame Tussaud's. But that was only friendliness, he assured himself.

A fortnight later Rudd found at the office the following letter. It was written in a cramped hand on pink paper with a coloured device of flowers stuck on it.

"Dear Mr. Sergison,—Forgive me for writeing to you but I should so dearly like to see you again. I have not been able to do what you said and make frends and my evenings out are more lonely than ever after the lovely evening we had together. I hope you do not mind my sending this letter to your newspaper but I had no other address and felt that I could not go any longer without seeing you again. I shall be at Swiss Cottage from six thirty to seven hopeing for you on this Thursday, and again next Thursday, so do come on one of them.—Your respectful and affectionate

"Rose Addison."

"P. S.—You need not take me anywhere. I just want to see you."

Rudd read and re-read this document.

To-morrow or Thursday. He decided not to go.

He retained this decision firmly until he had dined,

which he did that evening rather more liberally than usual, and he then asked himself why he should not go.

Poor girl, he thought. The only decent thing to do was to see her and tell her that he could not see her again.

He woke in the night and decided firmly that it would be a very serious mistake to go.

In the morning he was convinced that to go would be foolish and wrong.

After lunch he came to the conclusion that he would go, but would not stay. Poor girl.

He bought a box of chocolates and was just leaving his rooms when Lavis entered.

"Hullo," said Lavis, "where are you going?"

Rudd's misgivings had returned and he welcomed the opportunity of a second opinion.

"Look here," he said, and produced the letter. Lavis read it. "You must tell me everything," he then remarked. "Promise that or I won't hear a syllable. In matters of this kind one must tell all or nothing."

'Very well," Rudd said. "There's nothing to be ashamed of except a perfectly humane impulse," and told the story.

"You didn't kiss her?" Lavis inquired.

"No. I most carefully didn't."

"Did you squeeze her hand?"

"No."

"Nothing?"

"The only thing I did was to hold her arm for a few minutes at Madame Tussaud's, just to guide her from one figure to another."

"Hm!"

"But that was only friendliness," said Rudd.

"Only friendliness! That's the trouble. Remember that one man's meat is another man's poison. What is mere friendliness to you can be electricity to another, especially when she is an ignorant country girl and a nice-talking, nice-mannered London gentleman devotes an evening to her. You'll have to stop this, my friend; this self-indulgence masquerading as pity. Be as pitiful as you like, but keep it to yourself. Don't go about injuring other people with it."

"Injuring! I was trying to be kind."

"No doubt, and you were kind; most mischievously kind. I don't question your motives: I only want you to see that virtues can need as much control as vices. They're first cousins, anyway. Consider what you have done. You see a girl in what strikes your idle fancy as a pathetic situation. In other words, she has an evening out and doesn't know how to spend it. Being at loose ends yourself, you force yourself upon her, with the result that she is now in love with you. Any friends in her own class that she might have made, she has lost, because you are her standard and they are below it. And now you are going about saying, 'Poor girl, Poor girl.'"

"But what am I to do?" Rudd asked.

"Do? Nothing. Burn the letter and forget her."

"But I can't bear to think of her waiting there for me and my never coming."

"You'll have to think of it. That's your punishment. Luxurious self-indulgence must be paid for."

"But the poor girl?"

"The poor girl will wait this Thursday and will wait next. Then she'll tell her story to a fellow-servant, and the fellow-servant will reply with a somewhat similar incident and the remark that no men are to be trusted, and the incident will gradually close."

"Poor girl!" said Rudd.

But he had the strength of mind not to go to Swiss Cottage.

CHAPTER XXVII

IN WHICH RUDD IS SUDDENLY CALLED UPON TO DENY A PROPHET AND INSTRUCT HIS FELLOW MEN

RUDD had not been long at *The Post-Meridian* when on arriving one morning he was told that Mr. Luard wanted him at once in the editor's room.

As he walked thither he searched his memory for indiscretions in recent paragraphs; but he could think of none.

"It's all right," said Luard reassuringly, as Rudd entered with his expression of alarmed surprise. "It's not the sack. You don't get the sack from me. Thank Heaven, there's a sacking department. I've just heard that neither Ward nor Castle can come to-day; they're both down with influenza. So I want you to do the leader."

"The leader!" Rudd gasped.

"Yes, it's quite easy. It'll take you about an hour. I'd do it myself only there are too many other things: proofs, and so on. You know perhaps that Enderby made an important speech last night."

Rudd had to admit that he didn't know.

Luard groaned. "Haven't you read the papers?"

"Yes, but I was hunting for other things."

"Well, he made a speech last night. Here it is. Read it carefully. Then go for him. Let him have it. The two points to bring out are that disarmament could never be practical, the best preparation for peace being preparedness for war; and that the disestablishment of the Church would be an iniquity. Let him have it. Don't spare him."

Rudd retired to the next room, sacred to old Castle, his pipe and his daily castigation of the Liberal party, and studied Enderby's speech.

Enderby had always been his man, and every word of it seemed to him wise and true. Rudd had no politics beyond a sentimental leaning towards those that were talked at home in his early years, and a general feeling that the word Liberal carried with it finer aspirations than the word Tory.

It was not then partisanship which made him agree with the speech, but genuine intellectual sympathy. And now he must riddle it, prove it wrong root and branch, hold up its author as a charlatan and sentimentalist. In short, he must let Enderby have it.

Rudd's hand hovered over the paper. He had no notion how to begin. And the cheek of it, too! It was not even as if he had been to Oxford or Cambridge. He had no right at all.

And then by an inspiration he wrote the word "We," and found that all was easy. From that corporate pronoun, which removed the responsibility

from himself and divided it between the whole staff, even to the office-boy downstairs, he derived comfort, strength and an eloquence that surprised him. He let Enderby have it.

Luard made a few corrections on the proof, toning down some of the expressions and generally lightening the punishment.

"Not a bad start," he said, "but a little on the severe side. You young devils are so extreme."

Rudd gasped. He had not fully realized the position as he wrote.

"Do you think," he forced himself to ask easily, as he filled his pipe, "do you think that kind of article has any influence?"

"Devil a bit," said Luard. "Not in London, at any rate. People read leaders for the pleasure of agreeing with them. If they can't agree, it is the journalist who is wrong."

Rudd felt easier; his apostasy was beginning to assume the guise of a joke.

"I hope Castle will be better to-morrow," he said. "There's no fun in leader-writing."

"There's an extra guinea though," said Luard.

The cap and bells fell from the head of his apostasy with a crash. He thought of Judas . . .

After a perplexed afternoon Rudd wrote a note to Luard.

"Dear Luard," he wrote, "I hope you won't ask me to write any more leaders, except on social subjects. I don't want to say things I don't believe. If

this attitude of mine puts you in any hole I am very sorry, anything else you like to give me to do extra I will do with pleasure and without payment; it is only going against my conscience that I kick at."

The next morning the two leader-writers were still away, but Rudd was not sent for. It was understood that Mr. Luard was writing the article himself.

Just as Rudd was leaving, a note was brought to him with these words on it: "Lunch, Marble Hall, 1.0.—F. L."

"Now let's talk," said Luard when they had finished eating. "Your letter was all right, of course. But it was also all wrong. It was all right for a millionaire individualist who has time and money to keep his soul in cotton wool, but rubbish for a young journalist with his career to make. I respect you for writing it, and possibly despise myself for never having done the same. But looking at it nakedly, what does it mean?"

He fixed Rudd with his bright commanding eye.

"What does it mean?" he repeated.

Rudd, whose one longing was that nothing should lose him the intimacy of this magnetic adventurer, began to wish he had done nothing.

"It means," said Luard, "that you are proposing to get through life without making any use of life's essential lubrication."

"What is that?" Rudd said.

"Compromise," said Luard. "To come down into Fleet Street as a Liberal to earn your living on a

Tory paper, and then start a conscience and flout compromise, is the richest thing I ever heard of."

"Why shouldn't there be absolutely honest papers?" Rudd asked.

"Who is to write them?" Luard asked. "Where are the absolutely honest men? There's no such thing, except possibly on a desert island. How could there be? It was because honesty was impossible that compromise came in. Compromise is the sure ground between the quicksands of conscience and the truth. I suppose you think me as immoral as yourself for editing the bally paper at all."

"But you're on that side," said Rudd.

"Yes, but I'm not quite so lost to reason as to think everything they do perfect, and everything the others do poisonous; and yet I let that impression get out. Do you consider me an outcast in consequence?"

"Of course not," said Rudd; "there are degrees."

"You are compromising," said Luard.

"I mean that you're more a Tory than a Liberal," said Rudd, "and therefore it is not so cynical of you as it would be for me, who am more a Liberal than Tory."

"But you don't mind writing non-political things for the paper and taking its money?" said Luard.

"No," said Rudd.

"More compromise," said Luard. "You are getting on a dangerous tack for yourself as the complete letter-writer. Your attitude now is that a little compromise is all right, but too much is wicked. Well,

that is the whole secret. The duty before every citizen is to decide for himself how little compromise he can do with. Having decided that, if he prescribes a slender enough allowance and does not exceed it he will go to heaven; if he employs too much he is a scoundrel."

"I don't know that I go in for it at all," said Rudd.

"My dear fellow," said Luard, "for goodness' sake clear your eyes. Why, you are compromising all the time. Your letter to me was a compromise. If you had really felt as you say you would have resigned. Your willingness to go on is compromise. When you said just now that the steak was enough done for you, you compromised, because I know you like it much less red. To be as much in civilization as you are, and to be getting on so well, proves that you are a master of compromise."

"How beastly!" said Rudd.

"Not at all," said Luard. "How sensible and normal. All the same, you won't be asked to write another leader, don't fear."

Rudd felt no elation at the decision.

"I hope it's wholly because of that rotten letter," he said, a new suspicion darting into his brain.

"I shan't tell you," said Luard. "No," he added, "we'll go on as we were. Stick to your odds and ends. And," he continued, "stick to your convictions as to personal integrity as long as you can. They're all right so long as you don't exalt them on too high

a pedestal, and deposit too many wreaths before them. But they're more important in real life than in party journalism. It's quite easy to keep political depravity in a water-tight compartment and to be a gentleman the rest of the time. Remember that. I don't care how many leaders you write giving your old Liberal idols beans; but never tell a girl you love her if you don't. That's much more a test of character."

"There's one thing that puzzles me about all this," said Luard in conclusion, "and that is why, with feelings like yours, you brought yourself to write the article at all. Why didn't you tell me all this yesterday?"

"Because," said Rudd, "it takes me a long time to collect myself in any given emergency. Besides," he added, "a man often has to go wrong before he can go right."

On the next Saturday Rudd found the extra guinea for his leader in his little envelope. His original idea had been to return it, but Luard's homily had changed that intention. He could not, however, he felt, keep it, and therefore compromised by sending it anonymously to St. Stephen's Hospital.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE WEDDING

AFTER several attempts to be let off, which were all in vain, Rudd consented to act as best man for Doran, whom he had not seen since his Hospital days. Doran he had always liked for his simplicity and good-humour and unselfishness, and his letters were now so warm in their protestations of friendship and wishes that Rudd, and Rudd only, should support him on this most sacred and eventful moment of his life, that it would have been hard for even a strong-minded person to say no. Rudd was not exactly weak-minded, but he always said no with difficulty.

There are, for retiring dispositions, sufficient objections to all weddings, even when one attends purely as an invited observer, and until invitation cards bear the words, "No presents, by request," one of these objections will persist. With many people, however, even more irksome is the problem of clothes. A present can reduce itself to a matter of writing a cheque; whereas new clothes have to be tried on and worn. Some day, perhaps, the cards will also add, "Old

clothes, by request," and then how simple life will be!

Upon these two difficulties was superimposed, in Rudd's case, anxiety as to a best man's duties. Having inquired from those who knew, he ascertained that not only should he buy gifts for both the bridegroom,—of whom to-day he knew very little, not having seen Doran for long, while the bride, save for certain modern indications, he did not know from Eve,—but that the acquisition of railway tickets and the distribution of tips fell to his lot too. Some bridegrooms, he was told, were scrupulous to repay the sums thus disbursed, but others had been known to forget, either because they made forgetfulness in such matters a cult (as men can), or from the obliterative effects of so momentous and crowded a day.

Best men really out to do the thing well, Rudd was further told, gave presents to the bridesmaids too, and very often ultimately married one of them. Jolly information for the diffident and not too rich.

Having at last had yes wrung from him, with a tardiness which no sensitive bridegroom would have tolerated (although it must be admitted that his is a period in a man's life when his good fortune—his astounding luck—the friendly operations of his star, setting him gloriously apart from all other males—can stand between himself and the finer perceptions), Rudd was plunged into an agony of reluctance from which he never emerged until after the ceremony.

His preliminary misgivings were not diminished by learning that the bride lived, or rather resided, at

Chislehurst, where things are done in style; that her father was a stockbroker of vast wealth; and her mother a dame of the Primrose League, which in those days was a more active and alarming organization than it now is.

Everything, in fact, was as bad as could be; for Chislehurst has no patience with the shy; and the paternal wealth meant a lofty standard in bangles; and dames of the Primrose League, with lawns across which they were accustomed to move, sumptuously gowned and hatted, with outstretched entertaining hands, had for Rudd a peculiar terror. He saw in his mind's eye the bride's mother as a priestess of that great awe-inspiring class who always know what to do, what to say, and how to set others in their right place. Amid the many types that peopled his most dreaded regions, masterful women of the world were always prominent. So it is to be young enough still to meet trouble half-way!

With Rudd's adventures at the jeweller's, the tailor's, the haberdasher's, the hatter's, and (on behalf of the bridegroom) at Cook's and the florist's, we have no concern. Sufficient for us that on the morning of the wedding (for he had summoned enough determination and guile to avoid the preceding night's dinner and reception) he alighted at Chislehurst station, and, amid something like a demonstration from an assembled crowd, brought together by the white bow on the coachman's whip, entered a brougham at Chislehurst station in a new frock-coat which,

although it had fitted at the tailor's, was now too tight under the arms and too high at the collar, and a new tall hat which already suggested that the Spanish Inquisitors for all their ingenuity with machinery had by no means exhausted the possibilities of torture. Thunder being in the air, he was moreover moist all over, and his hands stuck to his new gloves. Why, he asked himself again and again, why cannot a man and a maid be joined together without entailing so much anguish and discomfort upon others?

Doran was staying with friends, and to their house Rudd was driven. The brougham turned in at a drive, and a footman hurried out to open the door. Doran, once so simple, was now signally among the swells! Rudd was led through a hall which smelt of expensive flowers, to a drawing-room which smelt of more expensive flowers, and asked to wait a moment or so and Mrs. Vansittart would be down. He sank into a chair and wiped his hands. Banging doors, bells, rapid footsteps and voices on the stairs testified to the excitement of the day, and now and then total strangers in new clothes burst in and either apologized and disappeared or shook Rudd by the hand and disappeared. After half an hour of this Rudd was informed that Mr. Doran having had his bath would like to talk to him as he dressed.

Doran had not changed much. A little stouter, thicker generally about the throat—that was all. He greeted Rudd with affection, and finished dressing to

the accompaniment of thanks to his old friend for standing by him on this wonderful day.

"Now, come down and have some fizz," he said, "and see my hostess. We mustn't be late. Bridegrooms ought to be there first, waiting."

They therefore descended the stairs to the hall, where some one had considerately set out a row of champagne bottles and glasses. (In the confused phantasmagoric impression which the day left on Rudd's mind, as a half-remembered dream or hypnotic trance, champagne corks and polished broughams had a prominent place.) Here Rudd was formally introduced by Doran to all the total strangers in new clothes whose hands he had already shaken or whose intrusion he had pardoned. He now also at last met Mrs. Vansittart, whose imminent presence had been threatened so long ago, and found her to be a capacious lady in heliotrope silk who welcomed him cordially and informed him that after all the dear Canon would be able to perform the ceremony.

"We are all so delighted," she said; "so much more interesting than if it had been merely the vicar."

Yet not more binding? Rudd was tempted to ask, but did not.

The hall seemed absolutely filled with new dresses, and the scent of kid gloves was now added to that of the hot-house flowers, in a blend that was almost overpowering. There were also, moving jocularly among the frocks, a number of assured young men with better fitting coats than Rudd's and sleeker

coiffures. That was many years before young men with trivial heads smeared their hair back to their coat collars and sold motor cars; but these were the same type in an earlier phase. The word nut was not yet invented, but they were nuts none the less.

One of the more assertive of these young men having indicated facetiously that time was up by remarking that eight o'clock was tolling and the prison chaplain awaited the doomed man, Rudd and Doran entered one of the thousand broughams in the drive and were driven swiftly towards the church, the passers-by stopping to get if possible a glimpse within a carriage whose white ribbon gave promise of containing such treasure as a bride, a bridegroom, or a wedding guest.

Doran was perfectly master of himself. "Nothing to worry about in a wedding," he said. "One's ready for that. You know where you are. It's popping the question that's the devil; working yourself up to it, wondering if you really want to, and so on. That's where the wear and tear comes in. I feel as fit as a fiddle to-day. By the way, you've got those tickets all right, haven't you?"

Rudd expressed the hope that Miss Endsleigh was similarly cool and collected.

"I don't expect so," said Doran. "Women are different. She'll be as brave as she can, though. She's an angel—an absolute angel. By the way, are you engaged?"

"No," said Rudd.

"You ought to be," said Doran. "Every man ought to be. I wouldn't change places at this moment with any man living."

They reached the church gate in good time, and threaded their way through the avenue of sightseers, and so into the crowded building, which smelt even more strongly of hot-house flowers and kid gloves than the Vansittarts' hall; and down the aisle to the vestry, where Rudd was introduced to the dear Canon and several subsidiary clergy. And then they returned to the church proper, and took up their places by the chancel steps to await the angel and her family. Doran was still perfectly at his ease, nodding to various acquaintances and assuring them by ocular demonstration that he had not yet lost the ring.

And then a tremor ran through the new dresses and new hats, indicating that the angel's brougham had arrived; the organ burst forth; and a moment or so later a willowy musliny figure was to be seen leaning on the arm of a short, florid, whiskered gentleman in a white waistcoat who had in his time eaten turtle soup and meant to eat it again; and the procession of angel, bridesmaids and bride's family began its rustling advance upon the chancel steps, on the top of which was now standing the dear Canon supported by inferior local ecclesiastical talent.

The organ ceased. Gradually the rustling subsided to a hush; the hush became a silence; the service began.

The dear Canon read the opening advices in their

entirety: he was not one to pander to false delicacy. It was Rudd's first wedding, and in consequence portions of this exordium came rather suddenly upon him. Some nice-minded brides, or their mothers, are at pains to induce the priest to omit a line here and there from these crude opening sentences; and often have their way. Others tolerate them as a quaint survival. Others again do not mind. Others, like the dear Canon, agree with the sentiments, and like courageously to express them. But however they are considered, Rudd found a certain piquancy in catching so large a company of conventional equivoking English people in their best clothes, forced to listen to physical facts.

And now came the crucial moments, which force seriousness on even the most light-headed.

"Wilt thou," said the dear Canon, bending unctuously over the couple and addressing Doran, "have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordnance in the holy state of Matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour and keep her in sickness and in health; and forsaking all others, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?"

Not yet had Rudd seen the bride, but now she lifted her veil and disclosed the fact that Doran's angel had rather a masterful face, with firm thin lips.

It's a great undertaking, thought Rudd. Forsak-

ing all others! How can poor fickle human nature, changing and developing every day, make such a promise as that?

But the good honest Doran entertained no such dubiety. "I will," he replied in a firm voice, and meant it too.

"Wilt thou," said the dear Canon, turning to the angel, "have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordnance in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou obey him and serve him, love, honour and keep him in sickness and in health —[How thorough it all is! thought Rudd]—and forsaking all others, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?" and the thin-lipped angel replied "I will" without a tremor.

Did the dear Canon, so bland, prosperous and beneficent, Rudd wondered, as he bent over all these couples and conducted these delicate negotiations, ever give a thought to possible sequels in the Probate, Admiralty and Divorce Division? Surely not, or he could not have been so suave and assured and creamy, so obviously performing a divine mission.

And then the two brave things, hand in hand, plighted their troth for ever—for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, to love and to cherish till death did them part; and the dear Canon gave way to the inferior clergy and began to turn his thoughts to the address which he always gave on these occasions, but which each family who secured his services believed

to be specially composed for themselves. No physiology here; but a hint or so of the possible need of give-and-take in the matrimonial state.

And then voices breathed again o'er Eden and the congregation sought the fresh air.

CHAPTER XXIX

FURTHER PROOF THAT A WOMAN'S INTEREST IN A MAN MUST BE MANAGED WITH SKILL IF SHE IS TO HOLD HIM

THERE was no bridesmaid whom Rudd felt in danger of himself leading to the altar, but Eva Lasker was quite amusing at lunch.

More than amusing: attractive, Rudd thought. She had a mass of brown hair and slender white hands. Her mouth was pretty too, and her voice rich and vibrating. Her age was in reality thirty, but she had all the machinery of twenty-five.

Rudd asked her if she too wrote, and she admitted that she had dabbled.

"But my efforts," she said, "are the merest rubbish. Now yours . . . ! I am sure you write the kind of things I like."

"Why?"

"Well, you look like it. There's penetration in your eyes; you seem to see right inside."

Rudd liked her.

"And then," she continued—"but you'll think I am horribly observant——"

"Not at all; what then?"

"Why, your hands. They're very interesting. You see, I've studied palmistry. I've got a certificate for it."

"You don't really believe in that sort of thing?" Rudd asked.

"Of course I do," she replied. "It's an exact science. I know."

"Do you mean to tell me that our characters are written in the lines of the hands?" Rudd said, with a laugh.

"Why not?" she replied. "That's not more remarkable than many other things about us. We are fearfully and wonderfully made. But undoubtedly our characters are written there. And more too. Not only our characters but our whole lives, past, present and future."

"You can prophesy as well?" said Rudd.

"Yes," replied Miss Lasker, "but as a matter of fact we're not allowed to. Now just lay your right hand on the table for a moment, palm upwards."

She bent a comely head over it for a second and half whistled. "Most interesting," she murmured partly to herself. "But then," she added, "we're not talking right at all. We ought to be discussing plays or books," and she laughed brightly.

"You've shaken me," said Rudd. "I always felt that these sort of things—phrenology, chirop—I mean palmistry—were just fakes. Now, the only thing I really want is to have my hands read. Mayn't I?"

"We can't do it here," said Miss Lasker. "Some time of course I should love to read them."

Later they played the game, and touched upon books: their favourite authors. What would lunch or dinner parties be without these useful fellows?

Miss Lasker confessed to a recent passion for Tourguéniev. Rudd must read him too. Rudd said that he would, and she offered to lend him one.

Would he have a French translation or an English?

English, Rudd thought. Yes, English.

He would be delighted to accept the loan.

"You'll be sure to let me have it back?" she said. "Book borrowers, you know. The sad sad gaps in my shelves!"

Rudd promised.

Who were the best novelists? was a question they then debated.

The great name of Dickens came up; but Miss Lasker demurred and lost her vivacity.

"Don't you like Dickens?" Rudd asked.

She opened her eyes a little hopelessly. "Do you know, I'm awfully sorry, and I know it just puts me clean out of court; but I never could read him."

"It's your loss," said Rudd.

"So I'm always told," she replied.

"Why don't you try again?" Rudd asked. "If I sent you *David Copperfield* would you promise to try?"

"Of course I would," said Miss Lasker. "But I

don't think I could let you spend money on me like that."

"Shall I steal it for you, then?" Rudd asked. "For I mean to send it; that is, if you give me your address."

"I'll accept it," said Miss Lasker, "on one condition."

"Well?"

"That you don't send it, but bring it."

"Very well," said Rudd, and added that he would bring his hands with him too.

He now had to talk to the bridesmaid on the other side, who was not interesting, for she talked solely about herself.

A few days later, on the afternoon appointed, Rudd called at the house in Queen's Gate and was ushered into a small room where Miss Lasker was seated.

She rose as he entered and met him half-way.

"You look tired," she said, scanning his face anxiously. "You've been overworking."

Rudd was perfectly sure that he had not, but her solicitude pleased him. He passed his hand wearily over his forehead. "Life *is* tiring," he said.

"Yes indeed," she replied. "Especially to brain-workers. They give out so much all the time."

She turned to make the tea, and Rudd, trying to talk like a brain-worker who had been giving out too much, glanced round the room. It was a blend of cosiness and culture. The chairs were comfortable, the fire was ample and active; on the walls were

Arundel Society reproductions and autotypes, and the many shelves were full of books, which turned out, on closer inspection, to be the right books—that is to say, Stevenson, Pater, Hardy, Meredith, Henry James, and so forth. These were in sets. There were no discoveries.

"Have you read all these?" Rudd asked.

"Oh yes, many times! My dear books!" she said. "What a solace! what friends!"

"No Dickens, of course!" said Rudd.

"We have them," she said. "But they're in father's den. He loves them."

Rudd presented his parcel, and they settled down to tea.

Miss Lasker, it seemed, like Miss Dewsberry of horrid memory (Rudd could not get her out of his mind at all at the moment), had a little room of her own and a circle of her own friends. Upstairs was a mother who had been perfectly trained to keep her place.

"I hope you'll dine with us soon," said Miss Lasker, "and then you will meet her. Father too. But there's no need to see either to-day. To-day I want you all to myself. I want to know what you have been doing?"

"Nothing much," said Rudd. "Not what I ought to have been doing. Just journalism."

"Oh, but you must," said Miss Lasker. "You ought to be writing a book. Sugar?"

"No, thank you."

"A real book with yourself in it. Milk?"

"Yes, please. Only a very little."

"Of course you must write a book. Bread and butter or toast? With a head and eyes like yours you must write a novel. Haven't you anything with you that I might see?"

"Nothing but some paragraphs in to-day's paper," said Rudd.

"Oh, let me see those!" said Miss Lasker, all eagerness and impatience.

Rudd fetched *The Post-Meridian* from the hall, where he had left it, and directed her attention to his morning's labours.

She read them with flattering thoroughness.

"Of course you are a writer," she said, as she finished. "You have a flair. I can see it even in these little things. Straws tell how the wind blows, you know. Your phrasing is so epigrammatic and terse. Surely you write poetry?"

Rudd confessed that he had done so. Verse at any rate.

Miss Lasker knew it. "Won't you let me see something?" she asked again. "Won't you make up a little parcel of your things and let me read them before you come again? That is, if you *will* come again," she added.

Rudd said that he should be delighted to. She was really a very remarkable girl. Her intuition was wonderful, so swift and accurate. Fancy spotting that he had written verse.

"You were going to read my hand," Rudd said, a little later.

She laughed. "The converted sceptic!" she said gaily.

"I admit it," said Rudd. "No dreary consistency for me."

"'The bugbear of little minds.'" Miss Lasker quoted.

What a clever girl! Rudd thought again.

"Won't you sit there facing me?" Miss Lasker said; and he did so.

She took up a magnifying glass and a slender penholder of jade, and bade him spread his palms outwards side by side.

"I'm afraid they're very dirty," he said as he did so.

"Oh, dear, I did hope you wouldn't say that," Miss Lasker replied. "All the men say that!"

Rudd felt humiliated. He had begun to think himself unique. He felt a tinge of jealousy too. How many infernal men's hands had she read?

"But whereas most of the men's really are dirty, yours are beautifully clean," Miss Lasker added, by way of solace.

She examined both palms through her glass in silence.

"Dear! dear!" she said at last. "I'm afraid you haven't done quite so much with your life as you should. Still, you are young yet. How old are you?"

"Twenty-five," said Rudd.

"Twenty-five!" she exclaimed in surprise. "When is your birthday?"

"In October," said Rudd.

"How very odd! So is mine," said Miss Lasker. "Not the twelfth, is it?"

"No, the tenth," said Rudd.

"Well, that's most amazingly near," said Miss Lasker. "To think that when you were a little baby boy, wherever you were, I was a little baby girl somewhere else, and twenty-five years later we should meet!"

For some reason or other Rudd thought this extraordinarily true, but reflecting upon it afterwards, he realized that it was a fairly normal beginning. There must always be infantile contemporaries in different places. Miss Lasker, however, with her jade stick, and her magnifying glass, and her proximity, and the touch of her hand as she moved his about, had made it seem supernatural.

"You see," said Miss Lasker, pointing out a line in his left palm with the jade stick. "This hand shows what we are born with; the right shows what we make of ourselves. Now, look at this line. It indicates brain power. But see how much deeper it is in the left than the right. You haven't worked hard enough."

Rudd admitted it.

"You have fine hands," she said later, after another long scrutiny. "Wonderful hands. And you'll live for ever. Look at the line of life. But there's some

trouble ahead. The heart line is broken. See these little crosses"—the jade stick tickled his palm delightfully—"they mean trouble. You must be careful with your affections—you must keep them under control."

By this time Rudd was in a mazy state, and as she went on his condition became more and more hypnotic, so that when she dropped his hands and rose, he almost reeled.

He was also a little intoxicated by the superb character which she had given him.

Miss Lasker, after a glance at the clock, dismissed him rather abruptly by fetching the Tourguéniev and handing it to him. "Remember," she said, "I shall want your opinion of this next week. I am sure you will read it with peculiar insight."

Rudd promised to read it at once, and took his leave.

On the doorstep he found a tall youth in a brown suit and a large felt hat. He had a green tie. Another of her friends, Rudd thought a little bitterly.

None the less, he walked across the park on air; he had found a muse.

That night Rudd looked out a few ewe lambs and posted them.

In the intervening week he thought about Miss Lasker from time to time. She was a good sort, he decided, and excellent company. She didn't bore him as that Dewsberry girl had done, and yet he was conscious of tiny suspicions. He could not help the feeling that she had said most of her things before.

How many young geniuses did she discover every week? he wondered. Silly to be so wholesale.

None the less, when Thursday afternoon arrived, Rudd was to be seen, rather more carefully dressed than usual, on Miss Lasker's doorstep.

She received him with graciousness and warmth.

"Let me see," she said as she sat down to the tea-table, "you take sugar and no milk, don't you? I like to remember these little idiosyncrasies."

She was so pleased with her memory that Rudd could not undeceive her, and his tea nearly made him sick.

"Well," he asked, "what about Dickens?"

Miss Lasker looked at him piteously as though begging not to be thrashed.

"Haven't you read it yet?" Rudd asked.

"As much as I can," Miss Lasker admitted.

"And you don't like it?"

"Oh, of course, here and there. One can't help it. But I'm afraid I'm hopeless. You must give me up. I warned you, you know."

"But what about Mr. Micawber?" Rudd asked.

"A good comic figure, of course," said Miss Lasker.

"Only that?" Rudd asked.

"It's all so overdrawn," said Miss Lasker. "Such caricatures."

"But the bigness of it all!" said Rudd. "The scale, the spirit!"

"They seemed to be able to do that quite easily, those Victorians," Miss Lasker replied. "I'm afraid

I'm too modern for it all. I'm such a child of the age."

"So am I, I suppose," said Rudd. "Yet I adore Dickens.

"You'll grow out of that," Miss Lasker again remarked.

"I hope not," said Rudd. "I hope to admire him more and more."

Miss Lasker sighed. "How splendid and loyal of you!" she said.

"Not a bit," said Rudd, nettled.

"Oh yes, it is. You're so chivalrous and kind. You hate to give up an old friend. But you'll have to. Do you know something?"

"What?" Rudd asked. He was getting tired of this. He always hated argument, and he knew that the girl was wrong.

"I'll tell you," said Miss Lasker. "There's a thing of yours among that bundle you sent me which is worth all Dickens."

"Good heavens!" cried Rudd. "What do you mean?"

"It's true," she said. "That tiny sketch called 'The Crimson Madonna.' That's modern, if you like. It's exquisite. It's so full of atmosphere and feeling: imaginative sympathy, don't you know."

Rudd was feeling genuinely miserable.

"Dickens could only knock about on the surface and make people laugh," Miss Lasker went on, "but

this thing of yours—it's so intimate, so understanding. It leaves him nowhere."

Rudd was furious. He wanted nothing that she was giving him. He did not want butter on that scale, nor any butter at all at the expense of the real thing. He had enough power of self-criticism to know that Miss Lasker was being an ass.

All unconscious of his annoyance, she continued to babble forth her rapture; but Rudd was disgusted. He had had enough. He sat through another half-hour suffering acutely, and then collected his ewe lambs and left.

By a strange chance the tall sallow youth in the green tie was again on the doorstep waiting to be admitted. Thursday was evidently his afternoon too.

"You take her," Rudd muttered.

CHAPTER XXX

PLOVERS' EGGS

RUDD was well over twenty before he met magnificence. He had lunched now and then with Luard at his club or a Strand restaurant in a style far beyond his own habits; but Luard was merely a Londoner who did himself fairly well. He was not the real thing.

"I have heard of an opportunity for you," wrote a friend. "A Mr. Bloor, an American, is in London, at Sirridge's Hotel. He has come to Europe as commissioner for an international art exhibition to be held in New York, and he wants a secretary. It will mean travel, and, I should say, some interesting experience. He is a rich man apart from his work, which is largely a hobby. If the idea appeals to you, call on him with the enclosed card any morning before twelve; or call anyway."

This letter finding Rudd in an adventurous mood, he presented himself the next day at the portals of Sirridge's Hotel, the name of which was known to him as the names of ruling princes are known—as something gorgeous and rarefied and remote. A field-

marshal met him at the door, and two contemptuous gentlemen in knee-breeches and floured hair made the entrance into the hall several degrees more embarrassing than it would otherwise have been.

A lift soared upwards so swiftly that Rudd's stomach fell to his boots, and in a moment he was in the lobby of Mr. Bloor's suite, and his gnarled and slightly greasy ground-ash stick and far too comfortable hat were being taken firmly from him by Mr. Bloor's discreet valet. Rudd was then shown into Mr. Bloor's sitting room and requested to wait.

A number of the newest books and all the more cultured reviews and papers were scattered about. It was the first time, Rudd realized, that he had ever met with a private individual who bought the *Quarterly* and *Edinburgh;* and the rumour that Mr. Bloor was wealthy, which the hotel and the valet had done their best to corroborate, now became a fact.

Rudd was looking at a novel when Mr. Bloor entered and wished him good morning with an engaging cordiality.

Mr. Bloor was about forty-eight, tall and slender, with blue eyes, a greyish moustache, greyish hair and glittering pince-nez that seemed to adhere to his face by supernatural means, for no machinery was visible. He was perfectly dressed. Everything was of the most exquisite quality, and everything, although new-looking, was so well made as to suggest the finest blend of ease and fit.

Rudd at once noticed Mr. Bloor's hands, which were

strong and reposeful, and his nails, which tapered and blushed. The impression which he conveyed, however, was not that of the dandy, but of a man of the world who believed in the best of everything: a Bond Street and Rue de la Paix cosmopolitan.

Mr. Bloor, speaking with a strong American accent, but without any American harshness, offered Rudd a cigarette from a cedar-wood box, and began to talk.

With infinite detail and some circumlocution he made Rudd acquainted with the fact that he was in Europe to persuade picture collectors to lend masterpieces for the greatest art exhibition ever projected, to be held in New York, and that he was in need of a travelling secretary to assist him.

"Are you interested in pictures?" he asked.

Rudd said that, without expert knowledge, he was.

"That's bully," said Mr. Bloor, who went on to demonstrate how necessary it was that in such a delicate matter as this the negotiator, or as he might almost say, the ambassador, should have tact, should be in a position to return hospitality, and so forth. Many a man could have been found, Mr. Bloor admitted, whose knowledge of art exceeded his; but there had been difficulty in finding anyone as familiar as himself with the capitals of Europe, or as ready to undertake a mission involving so much time and expense. He had also a further qualification, although far be it from him to define it, even if it could be defined: some curious *je-ne-sais-quoi,* some . . .

Anyhow, there it was! He laughed gaily and showed his fine teeth.

In England already he had been surprisingly successful. Lord Brighton had promised his Velazquez, Lord Croydon his Titian, the Marquis of Wessex a couple of Reynolds', the Duke of Canterbury his finest Rembrandt, and so forth. Nothing could exceed their courtesy and friendliness. But in each case it had been a personal success.

Mr. Bloor then began a detailed analysis of his own character in order to prove to Rudd that although there might not appear to be enough work for two in this campaign, yet as a matter of fact there was. For what Mr. Bloor needed was that his mind should be totally freed from every kind of minor detail, such as the remembering of appointments, the writing of letters, the changing of money, and so forth, or otherwise there was a serious danger of some of the more delicate moves in the game being coarsened.

Because Mr. Bloor was probably more unlike anyone else than anyone had ever been before him: differentiated from them not only by temperament but by mentality.

And as Mr. Bloor went on and on, and his chest swelled under his lovely black tie and his dove's breast grey waistcoat, and his mysterious eyeglasses gleamed brighter and brighter, Rudd felt an hypnotic *frisson* creep over him. He knew all that Mr. Bloor was going to say, and yet he would not have stopped him for anything.

Mr. Bloor concluded, for the time being, by telling Rudd that he liked him more than he had liked anyone on so short an acquaintance—and he was not one naturally quick to take a fancy to people; rather, in fact, the reverse—and he would be mighty glad if Rudd would join him in his great work. Rudd must think it over.

"And now, Mr. Sergison," he added, "we'll have some breakfast."

Breakfast? thought Rudd. He had had his hours ago. Still, he was under a spell; his natural tendency to decline invitations left him; for the moment he was prepared to do whatever this splendid creature suggested. And it was one o'clock, an hour at which the memory of the best breakfast begins to fade.

On Rudd admitting that he would like to wash his hands, the valet was summoned to show him into an adjoining marble palace of ablution. Here bath, basin, mirrors and taps effulgently beckoned. A new and odoriferous cake of soap from a Parisian box and a clean towel of softest linen were placed before him, and all the hot and cold water that could be desired were at his service—the hot one the tepid rillet to which his landlady had accustomed him, but a gushing boiling torrent.

Having washed and made pathetic efforts to bring his nails to something approaching the radiancy of Mr. Bloor's, Rudd was invited to brush his hair in Mr. Bloor's own apartment, where every facility for beautifying the exterior of man, mounted in gold,

awaited him. In a corner were a dozen pairs of boots and shoes on trees, and never before had Rudd met one of the godlike creatures to whom boot-trees are a natural adjunct; the mirror had two side pieces to it so that Mr. Bloor could examine his distinguished features from every angle; on the dressing-table were cigarette cases in all the precious metals.

With a consciousness of his own common-place shabby mediocrity which was becoming a gnawing pain, Rudd brushed his hair.

Rudd found Mr. Bloor drawing on a pair of expensive loose-fitting gloves. He then took from his man's hands a glossy hat, and an umbrella as thin as a rapier, and led the way downstairs. At the door the field-marshal ushered them into an electric brougham, which slid away like a gondola.

"We can get a better breakfast at the Lorraine than here," said Mr. Bloor, and resumed the analysis of his strange personality, which, try as he would to bring it into line with the mass of mankind, or even with a smaller section of it, still eluded his efforts, and remained unique, exacting, *difficile*.

After leaving their hats and sticks with a powdered lackey and being passed from bowing official to bowing official, they were led by the head-waiter of the Lorraine's restaurant to a table that had been secured for Mr. Bloor by telephone, in a corner of a large room which seemed to Rudd to be filled with beautiful women. There were men too, of course, and waiters moved softly on purposeful errands in all

directions; but the prevailing impression was that this was the home of excited and rather over-dressed femininity.

Rudd was startled from his bewilderment under these unusual conditions (so different from his usual lunching place near the Museum) by being asked if some eggs with asparagus points, a sole and a grilled chicken would suit him.

Rudd replied meditatively that he thought they would, realizing that a rich American's breakfast did not differ so strikingly from a poor Englishman's ideal luncheon.

Mr. Bloor then asked him if he preferred a Moselle, a light red wine, or a white Bordeaux, saving him the trouble of making up his mind (as is the way of wealthy bachelors with their guests) by himself recommending the hotel's Carbonnieux.

"And bring some plovers' eggs," Mr. Bloor added.

These preliminaries being settled, Mr. Bloor began to explain one or two further matters concerning his character.

Rudd did not mind. He was still under the spell. He liked to be there; he liked to be conscious of the busy chattering all round him; he liked to see the pretty animated musical-comedy girls, all, like himself, having better meals than they were brought up to; he liked Mr. Bloor's deep rich voice, his American accent, and his really beautiful face.

The plovers' eggs were eighteenpence each (Rudd noticed that on the menu), and Mr. Bloor ate three

and Rudd ate three. He had seen them before, in their little green nests in the poulterers' windows; but never had he eaten one, nor ever thought to.

"I love them," said Mr. Bloor. "They're bully. I could live on them,. I believe."

As another nest was placed before them Rudd wondered if a plover's egg had ever fallen to the waiter's lot. What do waiters eat? he asked himself. How can they eat at all?

Rudd and Mr. Bloor together finished the second nest: eighteen shillings' worth; enough to keep two or three families of poor people for a day or two.

And all around him were the pretty actresses eating them too, while their mothers, at home, in mean streets in Brixton and elsewhere, were doing as well as they could on bloaters and tea.

From time to time other deferential waiters brought other exquisite things to eat. Rudd dropped a fork, and at once another was laid before him. He spilt a little wine and instantly a radiant napkin was placed over the trifling spot. He thought of his mustard-smeared breakfast cloths and smiled.

The scrambled eggs required no effort on Rudd's part but automatically entered upon their nourishing rôle; the sole was perfect.

"They are better grilled than fried," Mr. Bloor remarked; "they retain more flavour and the soupçon of burning is agreeable."

Mr. Bloor had said a good deal about his defective

alimentation, but none the less he ate quite a good lunch.

"Now comes in the sweet of the meal," he said as the cloth was being removed and another substituted.

One waiter laid on the table the matches and the coffee, and another waiter came bustling up with a pile of boxes from which with infinite care Mr. Bloor at length selected two cigars.

"You'll have some brandy, of course," he said.

Of course! thought Rudd, and a bottle was brought with a date upon it preceding Rudd's natal day by some twenty-five years.

"Now," said Mr. Bloor, "let us be happy while we may."

Rudd sipped his coffee and his brandy and pulled at his half-crown cigar in a state of mazy benevolence; most of the other guests had also finished eating and were at the bland tobacco stage. Most of the ladies had cigarettes, a few because they liked them and many because they wished to assert their thoroughness as *viveuses*. The two groups were easily distinguishable.

Rudd had noticed earlier in the meal how few people can enter a restaurant with any naturalness; he now observed that even fewer can leave it unself-consciously.

At last came the time for his own departure, which he was aware of making quite as poorly as those others; and having paid the powdered lackey as much for minding his hat and stick as represented

more than a quarter of the cost of his usual lunch, Rudd left Mr. Bloor with the understanding that he should call at Sirridge's on the morrow to resume their conversation.

"The Fates keep me from fastidiousness!" he murmured to himself; but he feared it was too late.

That evening, however, he dined on one and threepence.

CHAPTER XXXI

IN WHICH RUDD LEARNS HOW COSTLY IT CAN BE TO HAVE ALL ONE'S EXPENSES PAID BY THE WEALTHY

THE next day Rudd arrived at the hotel in an undecided state. He was attracted by the offer, but his instinct warned him that Mr. Bloor would be an exacting and exhausting employer. Rudd also was in doubt as to his capacity for being enough of a swell to satisfy this exquisite person's needs. Still, it meant foreign travel, unaccustomed luxury, new experience. . . .

Mr. Bloor's man opened the door, looking precisely as he had done yesterday, and Rudd lived to learn that the art of being and looking the same is acquired in greater perfection by valets than by any other members of society.

Mr. Bloor was not up, having a headache; but he would see Rudd in his room.

Rudd was led into a darkened chamber. In the bed, illuminated by a reading lamp, was Mr. Bloor more beautiful and more *soigné* than ever. He wore a blue dressing-gown of supernaturally soft material;

his hair was brushed and tended with its usual perfection; he was shaved; his nails diffused a lambency. Now and then he moistened his forehead with a fragrant mixture of eau-de-Cologne and menthol. All the papers and a few new books—novels and memoirs —were scattered about, and a bottle of some Continental drinking water stood by the bed.

Mr. Bloor, apologizing for being ill, explained how careful he had to be, with such defective alimentation as his, which was so unusual as to have puzzled the leading physicians of both hemispheres. He then informed Rudd that he had to go to Paris on the morrow, Saturday, on business, and would be much solaced if Rudd would accompany him as his guest. He would not only be a comfort to Mr. Bloor, but they would have opportunities for further discussion, and Rudd would be in a position to decide once for all before returning to London.

Of course Rudd must understand that it would not cost him a penny. He was Mr. Bloor's guest. Not a penny.

Was Rudd free?

Rudd thought that three days could be managed, and he would be delighted to go.

But could Rudd be ready so quickly?

Rudd said that he had merely to see his editor and then he could be ready at any time as he had very little to pack.

Rudd noticed that at these words Mr. Bloor's smile became a trifle rigid, and he waited for the reason.

"I'm sorry that the notice is so short," said Mr. Bloor, "because it will probably put you in difficulties as to clothes. Paris has become of late rather absurdly particular about evening dress and so forth; and when in Rome, you know—— Now I have been thinking. . . . Your figure and mine are much alike, and it occurred to me that as you were being taken unfairly by surprise in this way, I might perhaps be able, if you were willing, to help you out. So if you will go into the next room you will find a number of things such as you might need, and Roberts will help you to try them on. They are spare ones of mine. They're all new. I always get too many, I fear. One of my bad habits. I'll ring for Roberts now. . . ."

"Oh, Roberts," said Mr. Bloor as the man entered, "just help Mr. Sergison with those things."

"This way, sir," said Roberts.

Rudd was bewildered. He had an evening suit of his own, but he was conscious of its age and shabbiness. Nor had he thought of it as necessary for three days in Paris. Such friends of his as went on brief trips to Paris went gaily off with one hand-bag. That's what foreign cities were for—relaxation all round. Yet evidently Mr. Bloor's Paris was but an extension of the West End; for here were all the habiliments of the idle rich.

With infinite reluctance and not a little shame Rudd allowed Roberts to bear away his coat and waistcoat and to see his scandalous braces. In fact, directly

he entered this flat everything about him took on an air of seediness; which was exasperating, and, he knew in his heart, wrongly so. Yet he was in for it now.

Whatever contempt for him Roberts may have felt his courteous impassive features refused to betray. With the tenderest care Rudd was assisted into three suits—one of quiet grey, one of blue serge, and one for evening wear—and all fitted well. The trousers were creased to resemble paper knives. There was also a satin-lined overcoat.

"You won't forget to pack your dress boots," Roberts said. "I daresay you wear an opera hat. Most gentlemen do. But Mr. Bloor is peculiar in preferring an ordinary silk one. Allow me," and Rudd was again put in possession of his own venerable apparel.

He returned to Mr. Bloor and gave him the news as to fit.

"That's bully!" said Mr. Bloor.

When Rudd left the hotel it was arranged that he should be at Victoria next morning for the eleven o'clock boat train and should seek the compartment reserved in Mr. Bloor's name.

"Roberts will be on the look-out for you," said Mr. Bloor. "Leave everything to him."

Having obtained permission from Luard to be away till Tuesday, Rudd visited his bank and reduced his modest balance by fifteen pounds. He had never taken out at once so much before, but then never

before had he become that most expensive person, a guest of the rich.

Rudd had to buy dress boots, ordinary boots, shirts, ties, a silk hat and box for it, and many other things, as well as to visit the manicurist and barber. He also had to borrow a decent-looking bag.

That day his lunch cost him tenpence and his dinner one and two.

CHAPTER XXXII

AT £20,000 A YEAR

MR. BLOOR and Rudd, after an easy and luxurious journey in reserved cabin and compartments, during which Mr. Bloor slept a good deal, reached Paris about seven and drove direct to their hotel, the Bristol, where Mr. Bloor was received like a prodigal son. A suite was at his service and an adjoining room and bath-room for Rudd. Where Roberts slept, Rudd knew not, but by day he was continually at hand. Mr. Bloor believed in using his servants, whether they were professional or amateur.

Mr. Bloor suggested dining quietly and lightly at the Anglais, and, as they were so late and the journey was fatiguing, going to bed.

"Never tire yourself in Paris," he said. "It is everyone's tendency and very foolish, because although it excites the nervous system, Paris is naturally exhausting to foreigners physically, and you want all your strength for digestion. One should rest a great deal in Paris."

Resting was not in the least Rudd's notion of a holiday in Paris, but he accepted the dictum.

At the Café Anglais (now, alas! no more) they found a table in a corner, and Mr. Bloor and the head waiter proceeded to build up a meal. Speaking in his slow and careful French, Mr. Bloor ascertained the respective merits of everything in the kitchen and eventually decided upon a *Petite Marmite,* a sole very simply done, a quarter of a saddle of *pré salé* and some early asparagus. With this they were to drink a soft and delicate claret upon the peculiar excellence of which the wine-waiter was prepared to stake his honour and faith. Over this meal they sat for two hours, the last of which was spent in tasting old brandy back to Waterloo under the delighted attention of the head waiter, who rejoiced in their gustatory satisfaction as keenly as though it was his own.

Rudd had not been long in discovering certain things about Mr. Bloor. One was that Mr. Bloor liked an audience. Another was that Mr. Bloor liked a protégé, especially one to whom the grand life was novel. Another was that Mr. Bloor was not much in earnest about his mission when the time came to carry it on. He was the type of man who spends happier hours in getting ready to begin than in beginning; therein differing very sharply from his potential secretary, who liked plunging in. So far, Mr. Bloor had not referred again to the work.

I shall hear enough about it to-morrow, Rudd thought, as he prepared for sleep.

The next morning was Sunday and Rudd was up and out early. He went first along the river to Nôtre

Dame and heard Mass; and then to the Morgue, which in those days was open to all, and saw through the glass four bodies on the sloping slab. They were all dressed, and this and the yellowness of their skin made them more like fallen wax-works than details in unsolved mysteries of passion, crime or dejection.

Afterwards he entered the Louvre for an hour to see the "Monna Lisa" and the "Winged Victory" and the "Venus of Milo," and so back to the hotel in time for *déjeuner*.

Mr. Bloor was ready in radiantly cut clothes, with a new grey-blue waistcoat. He had with him some field-glasses, for after breakfast, he explained, they were going to Longchamps to see this or that Prix and the spring fashions. But breakfast first, at Voisin's.

Voisin's, which was then at the top of its form, severe, distinguished and ambassadorial, provided them with a simple but very choice meal, again ordered by Mr. Bloor in confidential collaboration with the head waiter. It began with a slice of melon, which was not Rudd's first acquaintance with that delicacy, but his first acquaintance with it at any but the other, or middle-class, end of a meal, and passed on to eggs seductively prepared and a chicken cooked in a way peculiar to the house, accompanied by a perfect salad. With this a dry white wine and at the end a Gervais cream cheese.

During this meal, as during last night's dinner, Mr. Bloor's conversation was largely devoted to one's

duty to one's stomach and the pleasure of artistic gastronomy. Often the simplest was the most luxurious. For his part indeed he cared only for simple food, but it must be good. Only in good restaurants did they understand food: and these restaurants therefore were, as he always said, the cheapest in the end. Take mutton, for example. At Voisin's, he would wager, they kept scores of joints hanging, all dated, and these were cooked not a minute before they were ready and not a minute after. Was it not so, Jean?

Jean, the head waiter, who chanced to be passing, asked to be informed as to the nature of the question: and then replied, embarrassing Rudd by directing his answer, in slow but intricate French, directly at him.

"*Oui, oui.*" Rudd murmured at intervals, and fairly honestly too, for he could detect the gist though much of the detail escaped him, endeavouring to force into his eye a look of intelligence sufficiently real not to belie him.

Rudd was not unique. How much time in Paris one can spend in this struggle!

Mr. Bloor also pointed out various other persons in the restaurant, chiefly Americans whose names were synonymous with millions of money. Here and there a Frenchman of note, too, and one Russian prince, well known on the turf, eagerly devouring forced peaches at ten francs each.

Mr. Bloor having paid the bill from a slender pocket-book packed with notes—slender in order that it might not impair the shape of his coat—they entered

a motor-car in waiting for them and started for Longchamps.

It was in the early days of motoring, but already the crossing of the Champs Élysées had begun to be a most perilous undertaking. The chauffeur drove like a Napoleon. They flew.

It was Rudd's first bold ride, and he thrilled to it. They had hair breadth evasions, and he laughed. The thought of danger never obtruded, it was splendid, terrific, and he wished it could go on for ever. But then he wished that all this strange new life might go on for ever: the distinguished meals, the luxury, the wealth, the sense of superiority and ease.

They passed other cars and carriages all bound the same way, all containing pleasure-seekers, and it was borne in upon Rudd as he looked at them how much more is woman a queen in Paris than in London. In London there are women enough and many of them are beautiful. But in London they rarely seem to rule, to command, to dominate. In Paris, in the country of the Salic law, woman reigns. Man has to do as she wishes.

Women were the principal occupants of these other cars and carriages, with men in attendance. At Longchamps the ascendancy of woman was even more noticeable, for the *Pésage* was captured by them, peacocking in something more than their best. The racing was secondary. Only between the latest models in hats could Rudd catch a glimpse of horses at all

This, however, did not trouble him, with so much that was vivacious in human nature to observe.

Mr. Bloor instructed him in the mysteries of the *pari mutuel* and himself did a little betting and was lucky. Rudd could not afford to gamble, but learned enough to be able to visit the paying *guichet* and collect Mr. Bloor's winnings for him.

The racing being over, and the prodigious task of finding their car accomplished, they returned to the Bristol, where Mr. Bloor retired to his couch until dinner, and Rudd was free to roam in the boulevards and assimilate the city; but, his head also aching, he quickly returned and lay in a hot bath like a prince.

CHAPTER XXXIII

ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE THAT IT'S OUR MONEY THEY WANT

THE cab took Mr. Bloor and Rudd up the steep sides of Montmartre at a gallop, with a cracking of the whip and clatter of the hoofs that made talking impossible.

Alighting, they entered the gayest room that Rudd had ever been in. A bright warm glow illuminated it; the buzz of conversation and laughter mingling with a merry tune filled the air; and in a space surrounded by the many tables with their white cloths, red lamp shades, and jovial guests, half a dozen dazzling girls with gleaming shoulders were dancing. It might be a factory of bitter morrows, this hall of pleasure, but no thought of any of them was present now. All was effervescence and vivacity.

Mr. Bloor seemed to be as well known here as elsewhere. A brisk little *maitre d'hôtel* greeted him and led him to a reserved table, where he was greeted as a patron by the waiter. Mr. Bloor ordered Marenne oysters and champagne, and settled himself

to observe the gathering and instruct Rudd in its peculiarities.

"Which of the girls shall we ask to have some supper?" Mr. Bloor asked Rudd. "Any one you like."

Rudd scrutinized them with a new interest.

"What about that one?" he said.

But Mr. Bloor had an objection to her.

"Then that one?"

Mr. Bloor did not approve of her; nor was he cordial about two more suggestions.

"I think you had better choose," said Rudd. "You know more about them than I do."

This being what Mr. Bloor had intended, he straightway beckoned to a tall, slender, piquante girl in red, with very low shoulders, who at once, as if expecting the invitation, came over, shook hands and sat down, with a little sigh of happy ease, wafting all about her a heavy sweet scent.

Mr. Bloor gave an order to the waiter, and then, pouring out wine for his new guest, drank her health, all three of them touching glasses, and the girl, whose name was Germaine, giving Rudd a curious quizzical smile.

Mr. Bloor settled down to talk to her in his grave measured French, and Rudd meanwhile was left to look about him.

The little orchestra of some seven players in red coats never stopped for a moment. One tune merged into another without a hitch, and each brought new

dancers into the centre. Some were girls belonging to the house; some were visiting girls in their hats; the few men were mostly professional. The girls for the most part danced together and kept their eyes on their reflections in the many mirrors.

At intervals a man sang. Rudd's French, which was of the precise Ollendorffian order, left him instantly the song began and never caught up again; but there was very little doubt that the subject-matter was one or more of the phases through which the great emotion can pass, comic or serious. Germaine laughed at the jokes with as much freshness as though they were new, seeking confederacy in both her companions' faces, but rather more in Rudd's than in Mr. Bloor's.

Rudd thought her radiantly pretty, but regretted her cosmetics. She had put them on not to hide age, for she was only twenty-two at most, but, with the intriguing perversity of her class, to suggest a voluptuous fatigue. This, at very close quarters, they did not achieve, for it was obvious that she was full of life and spirits. All her curves were young, and her natural instincts were for quick movement and gaiety.

Rudd was suddenly conscious that she was pressing his foot under the table, and, in the very midst of a sentence to Mr. Bloor, her eyes and lips flashed a message to him of peculiar friendliness. Flattering though this might be, it put him in a false position with their host, and he was glad when Germaine

asked to be excused while she danced the next dance.

"A pretty child," said Mr. Bloor, and Rudd agreed.

"I've been urging her to give this up and behave sensibly and get married," said Mr. Bloor. "She'll be old in no time at this rate. I hope she'll think about it. I might be able to help her."

To help people was, as Rudd had already discovered, Mr. Bloor's foible. He left behind him wherever he went a long trail of disaster, all proceeding from this purest and most disinterested motive.

Before her return Germaine had sipped a little champagne at two or three other tables where she had admirers; but she now settled down, not forgetting to face the mirror and extract comfort from it, to a very deep conversation with Mr. Bloor, of which Rudd heard but little, but which certainly bore upon some form of innocent future designed for her by her new friend.

"Well," said Mr. Bloor at last, "it is half-past two. We must be going." And Rudd, being in a dependent position, had to agree. But he would cheerfully have sat on till breakfast-time.

Their rising was the signal for a cataclysm of attention and courtesy. Waiters rushed to move the table, hats and coats were brought and handed and held, and the *maître d'hôtel* bent double. Mr. Bloor replied with suitable largesse and smiles.

Germaine came to the door with them and laid a caressing hand first on Mr. Bloor and then on Rudd.

"Au demain," said Mr. Bloor, as he gave her a bank note and proceeded downstairs with the assured step of one who had done a good action.

Rudd was following, when he felt a touch on his arm and beheld Germaine on tip-toe behind him.

"Keece," she said, and set her lips full on his. . . .

He descended the stairs in a whirl. Fancy her liking him as much as that. He had thought it was Mr. Bloor. Odd creatures, women!

Rudd passed a troubled night, in which Germaine's red lips were ever present, and the next morning woke to find that Mr. Bloor was suffering from one of his headaches and did not intend to get up.

Rudd therefore had to spend this, his last, day alone; which he did agreeably enough in various museums and galleries, with echoes of Germaine's voice as a *leit-motif*.

Now and again his heart would give a special thud as some passing woman wafted a perfume similar to hers. And so many women resembled her too. Again and again he saw her, as he thought, advancing towards him or retreating from him, and always his pulse quickened and his lips tingled again. He had never before been kissed like that.

It was the evening that was difficult, for Mr. Bloor was still too unwell to eat.

Rudd began it by dining at a Duval, giving, however, to the ordering of his simple meal an attention quite new to him, and he even sent back one plate as

unsatisfactory—a plate which a week ago he would have cheerfully accepted.

Dinner over, he roamed up and down the boulevards for an hour or two, his one idea being to get through the time till half-past twelve, when that fascinating night resort opened and he could again bask in its warm bright friendliness and see the woman who loved him.

Tiring of walking and having no wish for a theatre or hall, he sat down outside a Rue Royale café where there was an orchestra, and watched the other guests and the passers-by. Paris was very interesting, but already, after less than three days of it, he was beginning to feel a spiritual hunger. Among so much that was sparkling and brisk there was little that was cordial. He felt utterly outside these lives and utterly incapable ever of really sharing them. The impression came to him that he was inspecting a prison, and all these people were the prisoners. They could never escape, but he, if he had luck, and to-morrow's train left the Gare du Nord, he might.

At last it was time to start, and Rudd, both for economy and for something to do, began his climb to the Place Pigalle, where Lutetianism as prepared and spiced for the foreigners best flourishes.

He was a little earlier than the night before and the room was not so full; but nothing could exceed the warmth of his welcome by the *maître d'hôtel* and staff, and he was led to his table as to a throne.

Almost immediately Germaine, for whom he had

glanced round in vain, appeared mysteriously from nowhere and joined him, drawing the chair next him so close that he could feel her warmth, and enveloping him with that perfume of which he had been thinking so much.

Germaine, who looked a little less animated than yesterday, asked after the other monsieur. Was he not coming?

Rudd explained that he had a bad *mal de tête.*

Germaine's expression was one of intense sympathy as she pressed a shade nearer to Rudd.

The other monsieur would come to-morrow, would he not? Germaine inquired.

Rudd said that most probably Mr. Bloor would; but not himself. *"Moi,"* he added painfully, *"je reviendrai à Angleterre demain matin."*

Germaine was distressed to hear this, and snuggled if possible nearer, but she was clearly pleased to ascertain that Mr. Bloor remained in Paris.

"Il est gentil," she said; using the highest compliment which Montmartre knows, and which applies chiefly to rich foreigners. Far from good Americans, even while they live, can be called *gentil* in Paris.

The waiter meanwhile was preparing to take the order, and Rudd, observing this, faltered. He had only forty francs left.

He searched the unpopular back blocks of the wine-list for something that was not champagne, and the waiter's interest in him visibly evaporated as he did so. Germaine and the waiter exchanged glances.

Rudd at last ordered some Chablis—the cheapest—at seven francs, and some cold meat.

Germaine's face took on so wistful an air that Rudd had to ask her if anything was the matter.

She said it was nothing—she was merely *triste.*

"But why?"

Bit by bit it came out that she had a sister who lived with her and was very ill. The doctor's bill had been enormous. Germaine had paid it but it had swallowed up everything, even the generous present of the other monsieur, Rudd's friend, last night. Could Rudd——?

Here was a dilemma. Why had he not realized how expensive these places and these sentimental friendships were?

With real concern and regret and the deepest sympathy for this fascinating creature, Rudd expressed the state of his *bourse;* holding and pressing her hand to enforce his sincerity.

Germaine frowned and said that she understood perfectly, but Rudd noticed a drop in the temperature. Her foot, which had been touching his, was withdrawn.

Suddenly she replaced it. Could he not, she asked, take a cab down to the hotel and borrow from the other monsieur? *"Il est gentil, si gentil"*: he would lend Rudd much money so readily.

"Impossible," said Rudd, touching his head. *"Trop malade."*

Germaine was more than disappointed, and showed

it, and a minute or so later left him to sit for a minute or so at a table between two young Englishmen, who had been making signs to her, and who were in the reassuring company of a magnum.

The minutes passed and she did not return.

Rudd glanced across inquiringly now and then, always to receive an enigmatic expression in return, which might have said "Overlook this necessary manœuvre: I will be back with my real friend directly," and might equally have said "No poor man need apply."

He waited as long as he could endure the place, which had become mechanical, in the hope that the former construction might turn out to be the right one, and then after paying for his simple fare, including an unanticipated charge of five francs for table money, he left, receiving neither a benediction from his waiter nor anything but the curtest of nods from the *maître d'hôtel.*

It was very cold on Montmartre as he descended the hill. The learning of a lesson is often accompanied by chills.

Cabs, however, were still straining up the slope at a gallop, amid whip-crackings like pistol-shots and loud cries from the drivers. Inside were merry revellers bearing every sign that they had brought with them the passport to smiles and fun—enough money.

Rudd caught the first boat train and had a solitary journey.

"If I don't see you in the morning," Mr. Bloor had said, "good-bye and *bon voyage*. It's been bully having you here. You will let me know about things before long?"

And that was all. Hardly a word had been said during these three days about Mr. Bloor's life-work and Rudd's share in it. Several times the topic had seemed imminent, but something had intervened and Mr. Bloor had instead enlarged with much gusto upon life and the right way to live.

Rudd did not mind. He saw that what Mr. Bloor really wanted was not a worker but an audience, and he did no more than write a perfunctory letter of thanks which was never answered.

Not so quickly did Germaine fade from his memory.

The result of the Paris visit was a general toning up of Rudd's life such as he had never expected, and a further illustration of the power of clothes. He found himself looking at other men's clothes with a closer scrutiny. Even Luard's coat-collars, he observed, did not fit as they should, and only a week ago Luard had seemed to him ideally habited. Luard also fell below the standard at meals. Neither in food nor drink was he final: he was merely critical and particular.

But another and more valuable consequence of the brief Bloor episode was the stimulus to work which it imparted. For now that Rudd was becoming more expensive it was necessary to make more money to gratify his new tastes. He therefore cast about for

more work, wrote more occasional articles for *The Post-Meridian* and was altogether less of a *flâneur.*

But the odd thing is that he neither attempted a novel nor wished to do so. Not even after two nights on Montmartre.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE ANGEL AGAIN

SIX months after the wedding Rudd ran into Doran and his wife at the Royal Academy, and Doran bore him off to lunch with them at a neighbouring restaurant.

Doran was full of enthusiasm, but the angel struck Rudd as a little *distraite,* and Doran, he thought, searched her face over-anxiously from time to time.

She was a long while in making up her mind as to what she would like to eat, and was quite short with her husband for endeavouring to help her to a decision.

"You always like cutlets, you know," he said.

'How can you say so?" she replied. "You must know I detest them. He's always like that, Mr. Sergison," she added to Rudd. "He has no memory at all. I can't bear cutlets—at any rate in restaurants. At home they're useful, of course."

The waiter suggested a nice chicken.

At the moment, however, the angel loathed chickens.

"Well, my sweet, we haven't too much time," said Doran. "The *matinée* begins early."

"You two go on eating," she said. "I'll order directly."

But Doran could not bear the idea of going on ahead of his angel. "No, sweet," he said. "I like to have what you have. That's the way, Sergison, in married life: share and share alike. It's great."

Was the angel's smile really contemptuous? Rudd wondered, and a wave of pity for his clumsy obtuse friend rolled over him.

In the end they all had different dishes, the angel deciding at last on *croquettes*.

Rudd expressed the hope that they had had a good honeymoon.

"Ripping," said Doran. "Wasn't it, darling?"

It would have been better, she replied, if Doran had not lost her dressing-bag.

"But I soon got you another," he said. "Didn't I now?"

"But what about that train we missed at Basle? You couldn't make up for that, could you?" she replied.

It seemed that Doran's incapacity with a time-table was abysmal.

"Quite right," he said heartily. "It is."

"He can lose anything, Mr. Sergison," she continued. "I shouldn't be surprised if he has lost my Academy catalogue."

Doran clapped his hands in startled haste on his pockets. His kindly cheerful face fell. "By jingo,

I have!" he said. "My darling sweet, I'm so awfully sorry."

The angel looked at him without mercy. She said nothing beyond her impatient cluck with her tongue.

Rudd felt miserable.

"I'll run and get another," said Doran.

"It's quite useless," she replied icily. "That catalogue was full of marks, and was intended for Au t Augusta. I always mark a catalogue for her."

"Then we must go again, that's all," said Doran. "I don't expect your opinion of the pictures will have changed."

"This time I shall go alone," she replied.

A silence fell on the table.

Since misfortunes never come singly, it need hardly be said that the *croquettes* were cold and had to go back.

"Why don't you send for the manager?" the angel asked her husband. "It's perfectly atrocious not getting better attention—at an expensive place like this too. He never asserts himself in restaurants," she added to Rudd. "I can't make him."

The *croquettes* eventually returned, but her appetite had then left her.

"She's got one of her headaches to-day," Doran bravely stated.

"I never felt better until we came into this place," she replied. "If only you would assert yourself, Robert."

Over the mixed *pâtisserie,* however, she softened

a little, and she smiled graciously on Rudd when it was time to leave for the *matinée,* but for Doran she had only gloom and displeasure.

Rudd sat on over a cigar and recalled Chislehurst. Poor old Doran was in for it. That kind of girl wanted a master. He must have disappointed her very grievously in some way. Poor old Doran. How did the words go—"Love, honour and obey"?

Rudd shuddered. Of all his *bêtes noires* there was none more dreadful than a "vinegar"; and broken promises distressed him poignantly. Young married people should be happy and loving—it was monstrous if they were not. Quarrels were horrible. At this rate, what on earth would the Doran *ménage* be like in another year or so?

For a day or two it amused him, as he walked about, to pick out the kind of girl who might have made Doran a perfect wife.

But for himself not yet did he seek.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE DREAD SMALL HOURS

HALF-PAST-THREE in the morning was always Rudd's worst time. If he woke earlier he could sleep again quickly; if he woke later he could sleep again quickly; if he woke then he was doomed to eternities of wakeful self-reproach, remorse, and hopelessness. Normally he could shake trouble off; at 3.30 a.m. he was powerless. Despair and he were wed.

Rudd grew up late—if ever he grew up at all in the full sense of the phrase. He had indeed two halves, the development of one of which was permanently arrested. Side by side with a cynical preparedness for every kind of disillusion dwelt a childlike enthusiasm for gaiety and entertainment, for life in its essence.

To every place where life was to be found—or, in other words, creativeness, mastery, authenticity, no matter in what medium—Rudd was sure to go. His constant quest was for the genuine, and his pleasure on finding it was intense and absorbing. To this, to such a store of beguilements, was due the quickness

of his recoveries from hopelessness and probably the prolonged duration of his childhood.

Different are the armaments with which men stave off the arch-fiend *Anno Domini;* Rudd's was a critical curiousness, so varied as almost never to be lacking a field of investigation. Too seldom was it rewarded by complete satisfaction, but when it was, his state for a while was ecstatic. He rejoiced to be able to praise.

But at 3.30 a.m.! He had no resources then, no anodyne. Then, his brain whirled with thoughts dark and not to be vanquished. Then, the past was a procession of lost opportunities and unfortunate deeds, the present an anguish, the future merely an accelerated progress, marked by poverty and illness, towards the grave and cold unimaginable vacuity with Mr. Dimsdale.

It was then that Rudd envied his mother her simple faith. At 3.30 a.m. religion in whatever form you take it, but preferably, I suppose, in the tasteless capsule form as put up by Rome, is indeed a comfort and a joy. One can make an excellent show without it during the week, and even on Sundays: but at 3.30 a.m.

Rudd, however, drew no solace from that source. Such Christianity as he had was from the common stock which warmed the world before Galilee was a lake and which can never cease. It was of the heart, not the head. Dogma found him unresponsive and left him shivering.

One night Rudd woke again, at the dread hour, with the sudden recognition of a new truth.

He had been on a flying visit to Caston, and had looked up several old friends, and had seen in the streets several persons whom he had known by sight years before. To his immense astonishment he had recognized quite a number from their backs; and had then formed a conception of what time had been doing with their faces, and found it more or less accurate.

There was a debt-collector whom he used to see almost every day, years ago; and yesterday he had seen him again. The debt-collector was stouter and thicker; that was all. His step was still brisk, and his eye still alert for acquaintances to whom to flourish a hand.

For some reason or other Rudd was surprised to find him still alive. He had a kind of feeling that all these people ought to be dead by now. Again and again upon identifying men whom he had known as younger men or even youths he had this thought: that it was marvellous they were still alive. Yet he was only in the middle twenties himself.

And what a life for the debt-collector to have been leading all that time!—just the same, day after day, putting pressure on unfortunate persons with whom money was tight. Extracting an instalment here, threatening a summons there, all his life. Had he ever, Rudd wondered, wanted to do anything else, or was he contented? Was his ambition fulfilled? Now it was too late to alter; this was the end.

Rudd visited some acquaintances in business. Their offices seemed so provincial, so unlike London. London, although so near, seemed so far away. To live in the real country was all right; but how could anyone willingly live in a provincial town? Rudd would have perished sooner. Yet these friends of his seemed quite happy: their lives were cheerfully spent within these narrow boundaries. Rudd laughed and joked, but also he shuddered, so little of a philosopher was he, so fundamentally unprepared for any facts except the facts that he wanted.

He found his relations growing older. But then every one was growing older. It was the foolish rule of life. And old age was seldom attractive. He noticed that double or even treble chins seemed to be a rule among his kith and kin, and wondered what steps he could take against himself falling into that fashion.

He met a pretty woman, with two small boys in red jerseys, one on each side, tugging at her hands. Good heavens! surely that was Violet Ward.

She looked closely at him and then smiled.

He stopped.

Years ago he had called her Violet. But he couldn't do so now.

"Of course I know you," he said, "but I don't know your new name."

How extraordinary that since he had left and she had grown up and put up her nice fair hair the world

should be richer by these two romping boys in red jerseys! It was all so mechanical.

"Are these all?" Rudd asked.

"Oh no," she said. "There's Winnie, she's at school at Eastbourne. Couldn't you come and see us?" she added. "My husband would be so glad to meet you. You must remember him—Harold Beames."

Harold Beames. Rudd remembered the little beast. Fancy a nice girl like Violet marrying Harold Beames and having three children! What a world!

He excused himself and passed on. But the thought of the little tugging boys in the jerseys remained with him.

He passed the Town Hall and remembered the lecture on astronomy. He walked out to his grandfather's house, and it had gone and a new road was cut through the place where it stood. A wagon was passing right through the beautiful garden, where once were grass and croquet hoops and geraniums and lobelias, and fat yellow and brown calceolarias which you pinched between your fingers. Change truly was the law of life: hurrying, thoughtless, foolish, ruthless mutability.

His uncle Hector, who had retired from the governorship of the gaol, asked him when he was going to marry. In fact, that was a question of which he had been conscious on all sides, spoken and unspoken.

Why should every one marry?

"Ah!" he had said lightly, "when the Fairy Princess comes my way."

"Don't put it off too long," said Uncle Hector. "It's time you settled down."

That insufferable phrase. Why was there this conspiracy to abbreviate irresponsibility? It seemed that no one in this world could be really happy so long as one living soul remained unsettled down.

With what relief he had taken his seat in the railway carriage on the way back to London, leaving Caston behind. Not that he was not fond of them all. He was, and he liked to revive old memories. But he could not breathe. London was the place. London was the centre. In London you could have impulses and gratify them; in short, live.

That night Rudd woke at 3.30 a.m. with his mind full of his Caston experiences. He had been remembering them in his sleep rather than dreaming. And in a flash the realization came to him that he who was such a foe to crystallization was crystallizing too. The experimental stage of life, in which he had always unthinkingly placed himself, which was to end at any moment that he might select and turn into the real career, suddenly showed itself in its own true colours as routine too.

He, the free, the amateur, the cultivator of amusing impulse—he also was in the machine! In short, what he thought was only the curtain-riser was really the play.

He lay awake in a panic. He too was in the trap.

CHAPTER XXXVI

RUDD IS LAUNCHED

RUDD, as usual, took his depression to Uncle Ben.

"Come to Fort's and dine and we'll talk it over," said Uncle Ben.

Uncle Ben hated foreign cooking and disliked clubs, and Fort's had become his headquarters. It was a chop-house of the old type, with high-backed recesses to hold four, and a great open fire. Also there were no women. Fort's prided itself on this exclusion of triflers, on its beef, on its old ale, and on the extreme deliberation of its processes. It was quite a simple matter to have to wait twenty minutes for a plate of cold meat. Strangers resenting this fumed and went away, vowing never to return; which was precisely what Fort's wanted. Meanwhile the old customers looked on with amused expressions, or, buried in the illustrated papers, disregarded the disturbance.

No dentist or physician took in so many illustrated papers as Fort's; and it transcended Harley Street in its lavishness in the matter of *Punch*, for it provided two copies.

How Fort's kept enough prosperity to continue, no one could understand, for when it was full it could hold no more than thirty, and every one sat so long that relays of customers were difficult, and no one ever drank the sparkling wine on the profit of which so many restaurants chiefly live.

Fort's had two waiters only, Mark and James, and they had been there since the beginning of time. Both were wealthy old men. Mark owned a row of houses in Bermondsey; James had a small eating-house of his own in Southwark. Each was, if possible, a slower waiter than the other, and had either of them taken the place of the tortoise in the famous race with the hare nothing could have prevented the hare's victory. None the less, Uncle Ben, who was impetuous enough in most ways, clung to Fort's; although a stranger hearing the things that he would say to Mark and James concerning their origin, their personal unsightliness, their incorrigible depravity, and the debased quality of the food and drink which they reluctantly distributed, would have marvelled that he was there at all.

Yet he was there, every day, and such, to the initiated, was the endearing nature of his abuse, that he was also Mark and James' special favourite. It was, as a matter of fact, he who had arranged for Mark's son to become articled to an architect, and for James's son to be set on the road towards the highest goal in life in the Jacobean eye, chartered accountancy.

"Why I should do so much for so hopeless a villain

as you are, James, I don't know," he had said, and had done it.

Such was Fort's, and here were Rudd and Uncle Ben on the memorable evening when Uncle Ben suddenly remarked, "There must be no more nonsense. You must write a book."

"I wish I could," said Rudd.

"Of course you can," said Uncle Ben. "You are writing all the time, aren't you? Very well then. You can write a book."

Rudd pointed out what a difference there was between a brief journalistic effort and a long sustained novel.

"I didn't say a novel," said Uncle Ben. "I said a book. A novel, if you like, but not necessarily."

"Every novel I read," said Rudd, "fills me first with a desire to write one like it, or better, and then with despair that I never could."

"And I hope you never will," said Uncle Ben. "What is the use of writing a book like any other book? The way to write a book—the one I want you to write—is to forget that other authors exist. Now, I've got a proposal to make. I want a book written and I am prepared to pay you for writing it. But of course it will be your property."

Rudd could not believe his ears.

"It is the kind of book which a journalist can write better than anyone else," said Uncle Ben: "detached episodes that combine. I want it to consist of a series of studies of the old-book shops of London and of

their proprietors. Not merely the central ones, but the outlying ones. A guide for the book-hunter everywhere in this city. Americans will love it, and that is not an undesirable result. Go not only to Quaritch's and Bain's and Dobell's and Sotheran's, but to the stalls by Farringdon station, and the stalls near Butchers' Row in Aldgate, and to that corner shop in the Mile End Road, and to Camden Town and to Soho and to Westminster; in short, go everywhere, and potter about, and when you find a real character set him down in black and white. And sometimes you will find an odd book and you will quote from it; and sometimes you will meet some curious people while you are sauntering, whom you must put on paper—how they looked, and what they said. Begin to-morrow; and bring me the manuscript—typed, of course; not in your own ghastly fist—this day next year. And on the condition that you really work at it every day—for no matter how short a time—for that's the way to write a book (who was the fellow who said *Nulla dies sine linea?* I forget, but that's the way)—on that condition I'll give you half a crown a day, Sundays included, for expenses. Is it a bet?"

"It is," said Rudd. "But you're much too good."

"Rubbish," said Uncle Ben. "Pure selfishness. I want to read it. I wish I could write it myself."

And that is how the foundations of his first book were laid.

Uncle Ben again! That poor Japanese sailor who killed his boatswain in fair fight, but, being charged

with murder and fearing that he was bringing his fellow-seamen into trouble, committed suicide and left a letter asking their forgiveness, expressed a great truth in Rudd's life when he stumblingly wrote, "Our future often makes a lot of difference what sort of friends we have."

CHAPTER XXXVII

AVON

ON one of his rambles among book-shops Rudd met Avon: an elderly man, short and thick set, with a grey beard and grey head and no hat, taking down book after book, feverishly examining it and putting it back again.

Rudd, standing near him, was doing more or less the same.

Such contiguity can be very annoying to the first on the field, and as Rudd drew nearer, the elderly man became more feverish, now and then darting an apprehensive and hostile look at what he took to be a rival. For at any moment a treasure might be discovered—this part of the shop seemed a likely area for such an event—and it was unbearable that one's claim should be thus jumped. All book-hunters know the feeling.

Rudd, unconscious of his trespass, drew nearer, when suddenly, with an exclamation of triumph, the other snapped the covers of a volume together and hurried with it to the bookseller.

A brisk conversation followed.

"Ten shillings?" said the customer, speaking with an Irish accent—"that's a lot of money."

"It's a scarce book," said the dealer.

The customer laid it down and searched his pockets.

"I've only got six shillings," he said.

"I'm sorry I can't take less," said the bookseller.

"Then keep it for me and I'll call," said the customer.

"That's what they all say," said the bookseller.

"What do you mean?" the other angrily replied. "Do you mean you don't believe me?" He was quivering with rage.

"I mean that since I've been in business here, hundreds of books have been put aside for customers who never returned."

"But, man, can't you see that I'm different?"

"I'm sorry, sir, but I can't promise not to sell it if another customer wants it. Unless of course you leave a deposit on it."

"Why, that's what I meant to do," said the other. "I'll not be ranked with your rogues. You can keep your book! This isn't the only book-shop in London. I'll go where I'm known."

He gathered up his bag and stick and hat, and was stamping to the door. His thoughts were as plain as though they were spoken: I want this book. I've wanted it for a long while, and here it is. If I don't pay the deposit and secure it, that young blackguard there will buy it directly my back's turned. If he

didn't know it was valuable before, he knows it now. Damn everybody and everything!

He laid down his bag and stick and paused irresolute.

Rudd, who had no interest in the book at all, but admired the old fellow's fine grey head and pugnacity, stepped forward.

"Excuse me," he said, "but would you mind telling me where you live?"

The Irishman stared at him in astonishment.

"I ask," Rudd hurried to say, for he realized that in his present state of irascibility the foiled book-hunter might do anything, "because if you live anywhere on my way home I would willingly lend you the other four shillings for the book. I could then go with you, and you could pay me back."

The Irishman melted instantly into the warmest geniality. "That's very handsome of you, sir," he said, wringing Rudd's hand. "I live in Bloomsbury, in Hart Street."

"That's all right," said Rudd, producing the money, "I've got time to call there;" and they started off.

On the way the Irishman talked without ceasing. He said it was a book he had been looking for for years; he said that the bookseller's conduct had been insufferable; he said he had been hating Rudd for being so near, which only shows how wrong one can be, and he'd never cease to regret being so suspicious; he said he lived on a top floor with a housekeeper; he said that Bloomsbury was so convenient and

healthy; he said that in another minute he would have punched the bookseller's head; he said that he had been working for years on a new edition of the old dramatists; he said that he would never enter that bookseller's again; he said that his name was Avon; he asked Rudd many questions, but didn't wait for the answer.

After two or three minutes on the doorstep, spent by Avon in turning out every pocket for his key, Rudd mounted with him to his flat, which he found very snug and every wall covered by shelves of books. Books also were on the tables, on the chairs, on the floor.

"Wait here a minute," said Avon, "and I'll get you the money and something to drink."

He left the room, and Rudd could not avoid hearing a conversation just outside the door.

"Vyner, Vyner!" Avon called.

"Here I am, Mr. Avon," said an elderly woman's voice.

"I want four shillings," said Avon. "Give me four shillings."

"Whatever do you want four shillings for in such a hurry?" was the reply.

"I want it for a gentleman who lent it to me."

"Let me see this gentleman," said Vyner.

"Certainly not," said Avon. "I'll not have you peeping at gentlemen."

"It's not another of your begging scholars?"

"Not a bit of it. It's a gentleman who came to

my assistance in a book-shop and enabled me to buy a rare book."

"So you've been buying books again, have you? Aren't there enough books here already?"

"Of course there aren't. I've told you a thousand times no one can ever have enough books."

"Harbouring the dust," said Vyner.

"I'm sorry for that, I'm sorry for that," said Avon. "But it can't be helped. Some day I'll have glass cases. I've promised you, haven't I? I can't do more. Now give me the four shillings like a good woman, and bring in some cake and the whisky and soda."

Vyner sighed, and Rudd heard the clink of coin. Avon immediately after entered, all unconscious of the penetrating character of his interview, and paid him.

Thenceforward they were friends, and even Vyner's face could express welcome when Rudd paid a visit. Rudd soon learned that not only was Avon incapable of managing his monetary affairs but also his time. He was financially sound enough, having sufficient private means, but these were placed in Vyner's hands, and she, being the most careful of women, doled out only meagre sums and subjected Avon to a severe examination as to their expenditure. How he came to have so much as six shillings on the memorable day, Rudd never discovered. It thus followed that Avon was often a borrower, but he was also the most meticulous repayer; whatever else he forgot he remembered his debts. As to his labours, the least trifle could distract him and upset a morn-

ing's work. The want of a date which could easily be deferred would send him instantly to the British Museum; and then he would sit up half the night to make up for the lost time. The result was that few of his writings reached print. He toiled away like a philosopher in search of the elixir of life—in his case, a proof sheet—and was eternally baulked: a result due not less to his want of method than to an illegibility of handwriting which often baffled himself and which, with the advent of a typewriter, became miraculously more complex.

Between the old man and the young a strong friendship grew up, and they went long walks together in Epping Forest and by the river to Richmond and Kew, Avon finding in his well-stored memory a quotation from the poets for most of the natural phenomena before their eyes.

"Shakespeare, Milton, Keats, Wordsworth—we'll never beat them," Avon used to say. "The more of them you have by heart the happier your life will be, and the better you'll be able to criticize the new men too!"

Rudd was too young to accept this then, and he continued to buy the new poets and find their modernity and his own in sympathy; but as the years went on . . .

Meanwhile Avon brought him back to reading again.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

MISS BROOKE

RUDD had been again on Montmartre. Ever since his visit with Mr. Bloor he had been conscious, far within, of the call of that mountain. For a while, when he was more than usually occupied or interested in his work, it would be almost stilled; but it was never wholly mute, nor did either the passage of time or disenchantment when there weaken its appeal. Fond as he was of London and its greyness, its crowds, its complacency, its irony, its want of discrimination, its purposeless bustle, there came moments when to emerge from the train upon the scents and lights and intent self-centred activity of a Paris street seemed the highest and most exciting happiness. Partial as he was at heart and in the main to discipline and routine, there were moments when nothing counted except moral upheaval and the conversion of night into day and day into night.

Rudd longed for the boulevards, but even more he longed for Montmartre. That it was all a sham, he knew, and yet for that sham and its glimpses of reality amid its illusion he periodically hungered. Re-

served as he was, with a horror of employing his sleeve for any exhibitional purposes whatever, he wished again to be among the unequivocal and unashamed. That the daughters of joy are also the daughters of the horse-leech he was, as we know, aware; yet those sparkling tunes that never ceased from midnight till the sun was high: how he longed for them once more!

To be lost in Paris for a while; to live at his ease in a small hotel (no more of your pretentious Bristols); to get up when he pleased and go to bed when he pleased; to loiter on the quays and in the Marais until he was tired; to sit outside a café, watching French people and drinking French drink; to eat French things: this was periodically his longing, and now that he had means to gratify it, he often did so.

Englishmen who have lived in Paris laugh at such feelings. But then Englishmen shouldn't live in Paris. Paris is for the French to live in and for foreigners to exult in on brief and crowded sojourns.

Rudd never boarded the boat train at Charing Cross without ecstasy, and never returned to London without deep content and satisfaction. That is the way.

It was on the day after his return from one of these visits that he met Helen.

If statistics could be compiled it would be discovered that it is at dinner that most men in the upper and middle class first meet the women who afterwards become their wives. If ever dinner needs an apologist he will doubtless have to take account of

this fact. It was at dinner that Helen Brooke and Rudd met.

No sooner had he shaken hands with his partner than he knew her to be likeable. Everything about her emphasized this feeling. Most of all, she looked thoroughly, healthfully, radiantly English, and at the moment there was nothing English that Rudd could not adore.

She was hardly less than his own height; she had rich brown eyes, a mass of dark hair, a merry mouth and very beautiful neck and shoulders. She seemed to be about twenty.

She said nothing about books. She said nothing about plays. She adored golf.

"Do you play cricket?" she asked Rudd.

"When I get the chance," he said. But it was difficult, he explained, for a busy man in town. He went to see a match whenever he could get away, however.

So did she. In fact she had been to Lord's that day, and was going again to-morrow.

"Were you there to-day?" Rudd remarked. "So was I. That's odd!"

Immediately he had said it he knew that there was nothing odd in two strangers who had been in different parts of Lord's that morning meeting at dinner in the evening; but the circumstance, even without any supernatural element, seemed to bring them nearer, and that was what he devoutly desired.

"I'm going again to-morrow," she said. "There's going to be a good finish."

And golf—she remarked later—did he play that?

"Not yet," said Rudd; "I was waiting till I was too old for running games."

"You shouldn't wait," she said. "It's a great game, and the better you play now the better you'll play afterwards. I love it."

I suppose I must learn it, thought Rudd.

"I'm not much good yet," she said. "Captain Trevor —the one over there with the fair moustache—is teaching me. He's awfully pleased with me, he says."

Confound him, I should think he was! thought Rudd. Blast these army men. He felt suddenly immensely depressed, but glancing at her engagement finger and seeing no ring there, he recovered his spirits.

"And riding—that's the best of all," she went on. "Do you ride?"

"I have never ridden anything," Rudd said, and again his spirits fell. What a stupid empty life he had led! Why had his father never given him a pony, as other boys' fathers did? He could easily have afforded it. Why should Rudd be so handicapped? That infernal soldier over there was no doubt in a cavalry regiment, and probably played polo.

"No," he said again, full of self-pity, "I've never ridden. I've missed a great many things in my time."

"It's never too late to mend," she replied. "I expect you've done lots of things that no one else has. What do you do? You look like a barrister."

"It's not as bad as that," said Rudd.

She laughed aloud. "Hush!" she said, "my brother's a barrister. Do you really hate them so? So do I—all except him, of course. They always know, and that's such a nuisance. Even Dick sets all of us right at every meal. Then what *do* you do? I suppose you're an author."

"Why?" Rudd asked.

"Oh, all clean-shaven men at dinner nowadays are either barristers or authors," she said.

"Or both," said Rudd.

"Yes, or both. Books aren't much in my line, I'm afraid," she added. "I'd love to be able to talk about them, but I can't. I don't believe I've read a novel this year."

After dinner Rudd decided to make a bee-line for Miss Brooke directly the men entered the drawing-room; but Captain Trevor was too quick for him.

Rudd's heart sank, and with the best grace possible he subsided into a chair by a lady-historian to whom his hostess led him. What she talked about he had no notion, for, though he said Yes or No at intervals as the inflexion of her voice demanded, he was really trying to catch what Captain Trevor was saying. When, however, a servant entered to announce Captain and Mrs. Trevor's carriage he again became ebullient, and thereafter gave the lady-historian all

his attention, and quite agreed with her that there was more than a vacancy at the moment for a really conscientious and minute study of Sir Christopher Hatton and his times.

Rudd walked home warmed by new thoughts of life's duties and responsibilities. The home was the thing. How wilfully anti-social were the sterile excitements of Montmartre. Hitherto he had been detached in his attitude to women. Husbands and wives together had seemed so stuffy. Babies in arms had repelled him. Suddenly there appeared to be no other ideal of life than to live it with one woman, always, for ever. . . . In imagination he was conscious of the warm smell of a nursery: the little clothes on the guard before the fire; a flannel one a shade too hot. A shallow basket with all the mysteries in it. A kicking crooning pink thing on a dear lap. . . . No, it was not good or right to live alone. A man should be married. Not until he is married is he fulfilling his destiny.

Rudd awoke in the night and thought all these thoughts again. But his high spirits had gone, and he now knew that this splendid girl was not for him. How could she be? He had no money, his prospects were poor, and he could not play golf. And even if he did win her what was there for them to talk about? They could not go right through life on Ranji.

In the morning, however, when he awoke and saw the sun streaming through the windows, he felt more

hopeful. After all, she was very young and only needed taking in hand. And what a lovely creature! He had never seen such a neck and shoulders.

She had said she would be at Lord's, and Rudd went there too and began to search for her. Probably she was with a member in the reserved stand, but he looked everywhere else first. Then he stood in front of the inn, borrowed a pair of glasses and scrutinized the stand. Yes, there she was, looking charming in white. With her was some ghastly swine of a man—a new one. They were talking with animation. Laughing. Looking through the glasses he could hear her laugh. What a lot of people swells always seem to know!

Still, she had had no engagement ring last night. Perhaps, however, that brute was going to propose to-day. People often proposed at Lord's, Rudd felt sure. In vain did bowlers bowl and batsmen bat. Rudd, for once, had no interest in the game. How soon he could see her again (that ancient poignant problem) was his one thought.

What dinner begins, tea often completes, or at any rate reinforces; and Rudd next met Helen at that meal. He had paid a duty call on his hostess, and as luck would have it Helen was there too. Were ever the fates kinder? She was also alone, and was willing to be accompanied home. Any lingering doubt that Rudd may have entertained as to her being the one and only woman for him disappeared long before her house was reached, and all that he had now

to contend with was the question whether he was the man for her.

As to this he had the gravest misgivings, none new but very insistent as he pondered, as (*a*) she was a goddess and he was peculiarly mortal; (*b*) she was of rich and fashionable stock and he was simple and poor; (*c*) she was of joyful disposition and he was grave; and so on through many antitheses equally deadly to a diffident man. And when these were disposed of, there was still golf, for which he could not possibly find enough time, even if he had the enthusiasm; and horseflesh, the very thought of which appalled him. And then, as a last trifling detail, how was he ever to get on such terms as would make a declaration of love possible? And what on earth had such as he to offer a girl to induce her to give up her present gay and entertaining mode of life?

She had, however, promised to go to the Gentlemen and Players match with him.

CHAPTER XXXIX

LOVE

THE Gentlemen and Players match settled it. Rudd had had Miss Brooke all to himself. They had sat side by side, very near; probably too near. They had had lunch together. He had taken her home. She had promised to go with him to another match next week.

She shook his hand warmly and, in a state of ecstasy, he left her. This time there was no doubt about it. It was love and love unalloyed. No pity; no animalism (at least not conscious): just love, beautiful, worshipping, transfiguring love.

He had but one desire and that was to be with Helen.

Rudd, however, although he was in love, was not therefore overmuch in bliss. For one thing, Helen did not know it and might not reciprocate. For another, his nature forbade bliss except momentarily. It is because love is an agony as well as an ecstasy that so many men go without it. Their self-protectiveness saves them, and the substitute for the real thing can

be amusing enough. It is only the substitute that millions know.

But apart from the fact that Rudd did not know his fate and often feared the worst, he was one of those who are instinctively always a little afraid of happiness. A little suspicious. Perhaps it was a Puritan strain, so common, too common, in England. Partly it was his underlying tendency to melancholy and his passion for the fact. Everything so makes for the conviction that happiness is fugitive and the desire for happiness the only feeling to which mankind is permanently true, that it is easy to come to think of happiness as unattainable and add that fact to one's consciousness. "No," we say, "you may look like it, but how can you really be that joyous sprite? It is but another optical illusion." And by this time it has vanished.

But no one was happier in preparing to be happy than Rudd could be; and no one was ever more certain, sub-consciously, that the secret of life is to want rather than to have. Anticipation far beyond fruition!

Unconsciousness is the thing, and Rudd had it not. Time is such a headlong courser, with eyes always on some distant winning-post. The rapidity with which low tide turned to high and the sand disappeared; the continual too soon arrival of bedtime; the implacable transformation of a frolicsome kitten into a sinister cat: these phenomena, observed in his early years, alone would have embittered him against Time

and mutability. With a nature all ready to harbour such resentment, as he grew older and saw how few were the perfect hours of spring before it became summer, and how few were the perfect hours of summer before autumn, he grew more and more readily wistful and despairing.

Hence Rudd had not the brave open-armed advance upon pleasure. He looked at her narrowly and doubtingly. Scepticism was of his essence.

All the same, to the best of his power he was in love now. He could not sleep. He cared nothing for eating. Somewhere within him burned a fire. He adored everybody, penetrating to their delight and pain with sympathetic X rays. He helped old women out of buses. He braced himself to lead a blind man across the Strand. He gave twopence for a box of matches. The sight of other lovers, however banal, caused his eyes to light and glisten. He patted street children on the head. He beamed unctuously on perambulators.

Crossing Whitehall one morning with his thoughts elsewhere, he became involved with a slow uncertain cyclist and was well mudded. The cyclist fell off. Under ordinary conditions Rudd would have had something very caustic to say about the mud, but all he now did was to apologize and hope it was not his fault. The cyclist, not being in love, told him emphatically that it was, damned his silly eyes, and consigned him to everlasting punishment by fire. Rudd took the sentence meekly as his due.

The person who had worked this transformation was quite an ordinary girl in the eyes of the world, and something less in the eyes of her barrister brother. But to Rudd she was all in all, everything that he wanted a woman to be. For only lovers really know each other, and if they are wrong they are unaware of it and therefore they are right. Fact and illusion, illusion and fact, have no divisions when one adores.

Yet how could he propose that Helen should give up everything and throw in her lot with so moody and unsatisfactory a person as himself? He had always been vaguely afraid of women; there had always been a gulf not to be bridged fixed between their wonderfulness and his ordinariness. Not that he had any disposition to go on his knees: there was nothing of the mediæval knight's reverence about him; it was just the sheer inability of the shy and self-deprecatory male to face equal terms with these unearthly *soignée* creatures in frocks and frills and hats, to whom neither dining-rooms nor drawing-rooms offered any perplexities.

Helen, all unconscious, was queenly everywhere—queenly and frankly cordial. Her way with servants too—that touchstone! Servants smiled greetingly when they saw her, and she smiled upon them, but they never ceased to be servants.

Now servants always made Rudd uncomfortable, either in himself or for them.

For all her athleticism Helen never ceased to be

feminine, and those were just before the days when a certain masculinity was adopted as an ideal and girls took no pains not to be ugly. Helen, however she might join in our national passion for killing time and evading thought with the assistance of a ball, remained a woman too. That firm, full young bosom whose soft curves her golfing jersey so faithfully—for Rudd's peace of mind too faithfully—followed was also a resting-place for a tired child. Rudd knew that, and thrilled to the thought; but it brought him no nearer to familiarity. The miracle remained.

Some men, even as boys, have a freemasonry with the other sex. Rudd never had it, nor would he have chosen to; with all its agonies and doubts, he would not have foregone his awe.

And awe he felt in the presence of Helen, even when in an effort to bring the talk round to his own subject (as she in her kindness believed) she praised the wrong book or the wrong picture. Mrs. Henry Wood had long been her favourite novelist.

Rudd knew that Helen liked him, but that was all he knew; and she liked so many people. He was only one of the satellites of this dazzling luminary. Her frank friendliness with infernal young asses drove Rudd nearly mad. Discrimination is the thing.

Often when he suggested Lord's or the Oval, she would reply, "Oh, I can't. I promised to go with Billy Devereux," or, "I'm playing golf with Tommy Gatacre."

They were both, this Billy and this Tommy, and all the other Billies and Tommies in her vast acquaintance, expensive and idle youths, and into this set he, an indigent journalist, was proposing to break and bear away its very jewel!

No wonder he had bad nights.

Her people, too, were a difficulty. Her father was an amiable dilettante who showed Rudd his various treasures of art but maintained an aristocratic aloofness. Her mother, perfectly dressed, was always either coming into the house from a social event, or perfectly dressed, leaving the house to attend a social event. Her eldest brother, the barrister, read every book that came out, was personally acquainted with many superior authors, did a little amateur reviewing, and obviously had no belief in Rudd's powers. Her other brothers were at a public school, and proficient at games.

Add to these somewhat daunting circumstances two or three men-servants who were perfectly aware why Rudd came to the house.

He could hear them discuss him.

"After Miss Helen, he is!"

"Not her style, is he? I should say some of that Sandhurst lot had a better chance."

"Oh, you never know. The high-steppers often take a quiet one."

"What's he do?"

"I don't know. Newspaper man very likely, or

he might be a Government clerk. They've got all sorts there."

"Well, one thing's pat—she's too good for him."

"I should rather think so."

Whether or not these remarks were ever made, Rudd had no difficulty in hearing them. To some extent he could agree too. . . .

And yet she had got to be his. How could he live without her?

But still he had said nothing—not at any rate in words. His deeps called to Helen's: that he knew. Did she know it? Did her deeps call to his? (One says deeps for the sake of convenience; but shallows also can call to shallows almost as though they were the real thing.)

And how to put the thing to the test? Ought he first to see her father? Some men would have done so; but how unromantic! Ask Helen first, and then see her father—that was the braver way.

But how ask her? In a letter? A letter would be fairer perhaps, because he could be precise in a letter: he could range the pros and cons (Oh yes; he meant to point out the disadvantages of an alliance with himself) with more cogency if he wrote. He was never an exact or very coherent speaker, and under emotion he might make the most ghastly hash of it. Yes, he would write.

This decision he carried about with him for a week.

But he did not write, nor could he say how his proposal was actually made. All that he knew was

that he went down to the Old Deer Park one afternoon to fetch Helen from a foursome; that they walked along the river to Kew Gardens talking about her handicap and nothing else in particular, and came out of the Gardens hand in hand.

CHAPTER XL

THE PRICE OF HAPPINESS

AFTER their engagement Rudd and Helen were always together.

His work suffered and his friends missed him. Letter after letter came from Lavis (who after investigating the subject of medicine and surgery in various foreign cities was again in London), containing invitations for this ramble and that, for suppers, for London explorations. All had to be declined. Avon suggested various expeditions and mentioned that he was getting old and soon would not be up to such walks at all; and these too were declined, or accepted and then at the last minute cancelled by telegram. The first nightingale: they were to have heard that once again, a mile from Chingford; but Helen, all unconscious, intervened.

Rudd had a pang or two about his defections, for he knew that Avon counted on him; but he allowed the idea of his engagement to gloss over all. After all, a man's first duty is to his girl; there's nought so sweet in life as love's young dream; and so on. Besides, Rudd liked his pupil, for she was now his pupil

as much as his adored; liked to be able to answer her questions, form her mind, enrich her vocabulary. She was getting the right epithets very quickly. Hence if now he went into the country, it was with her. If he explored London, it was with her. If he went to the play, it was with her.

Then, after their engagement had been in progress for three or four months, came an interruption of felicity. Helen went to the North on a visit and Rudd was left behind.

In this unaccustomed loneliness his thoughts turned naturally to his friends. He first rang Lavis's bell.

"Mr. Lavis has gone away on a holiday with Mr. Allen," said Lavis's landlady.

With Allen! Rudd was surprised and shocked. Allen was just possible for one evening now and then, but fancy going away with him, and into the country too! To inns in villages where there was no escape at night! Lavis must have been hard put to it for a companion. But how on earth could he have wanted Allen?

Rudd walked moodily towards Hart Street, where he would find Avon and cheer him up. Poor old chap, he had treated him very badly of late; but under the circumstances that couldn't be helped. After the wedding, things would take their right proportions and their right place again and Avon and he could often get a Saturday. No more week-ends away with Lavis, though, he feared. Hang it all, what a lot

of compromise life demands! How marriage seemed to smother impulse!

Rudd rang Avon's bell, thinking again of how glad the old fellow would be to see him, and was hurrying past the girl on his way upstairs, after his habit, when she stopped him.

"Haven't you heard?" she asked.

"No; what?" Rudd inquired.

"Mr. Avon was taken ill and he's at a nursing home," she said.

Rudd turned white. "Is it serious?" he asked.

The girl said that she hoped not, but Mr. Avon would have to be there for some time. She gave Rudd the address.

Full of self-reproaches he hurried thither in a cab.

"Is Mr. Avon well enough to see a visitor?" he asked the servant at the door.

"Mr. Avon died this morning," she said.

Rudd was stunned.

Poor old Avon dead! All that impulsive keenness stilled for ever! No more walks, no more cordial talks on poetry.

Rudd recalled with burning shame how often he had put the old man off.

This rush of thought was momentary and he still stood on the doorstep.

"What name is it?" the girl asked.

Rudd told her.

"Then you're the gentleman he was asking for just before he died," she said.

Another stab.

Rudd walked home miserably. He could not exonerate himself. No engagement to a young girl justified this treatment of an old man. He attempted no sophistry. He accepted the blame.

The death of friends is always sad, and particularly so the death of elderly and lonely ones. Try as we will, we can never do quite as much as we should for any of these; there must always be a margin for self-reproach. Rudd knew that for Avon he might and should have done far more. "One must be more kind," he murmured to himself.

He woke up in the grey hours with a tinge of bitterness against Helen for robbing him of two friends, or at any rate for luring him to disloyalty. Not only against Helen, but against woman, marriage, domesticity. . . . He even asked himself, was she worth it? was any woman worth it? What was Helen doing for him, anyway? She was always jolly and she was interested, but she was no real help in his work. On the contrary, she was continually causing him to neglect it, postpone, and then have to write in a hurry, below himself. What a muddle it all was! And yet how could he give her up? Could he?

In the morning he had forgiven her, but he wrote to Lavis a long letter suggesting an early meeting.

CHAPTER XLI

THE BOOK!

RUDD entered his lodgings, soon to be vacated for ever, with his head so full of Helen and the immediate future that he actually did not, at the first glance, realize what the big square brown paper parcel, obviously containing books, had in it.

Then he fell on it with a cry and slashed the string in half a dozen places as the divination suddenly came upon him that these must be his dozen presentation copies of *The Literary Nimrod.*

No author can ever recapture the fine foolish rapture which comes to him with the first bound copy of his first book. Indeed from that moment, no matter what other rewards it brings, authorship is a steady declension. He may write better, or more acceptably, or more satisfactorily to the artistic conscience, in later books, but they all suffer from the disability of not being the first.

Late though it was, and tired though he had been, Rudd sank into a chair and adored his bantling. He fondled it and dandled it. His eye rested lovingly

on the page on which were these words and these only:

DEDICATED BY PERMISSION
TO
H. B.

and he smiled at the phrase "by permission" and the twist he had given it, for the permission was not Helen's but Uncle Ben's, to whom Rudd considered that the dedication rightly belonged, and who had, of course, waived his claim.

Then he turned over the pages and might have sat there reading the dear things in an ecstasy all night had he not come upon so many misprints as to depress him.

And then he inscribed a copy for Helen, and a copy for his mother, and a copy for Uncle Ben, and a copy for his father, and a copy for Lavis, and a copy for Luard, and packed them up before he went to bed.

He also sent a copy to Voaden.

Alas that there was no Avon to send a copy to! But Rudd had yet to learn how often the one ideal reader of every book is missing when the book is ready.

Rudd had no hope of *The Literary Nimrod* being reviewed in any indecent haste. "Published this day" was a headline which in his wildest lapses into conceit he never associated with a work from his own pen, nor was he convinced that, great as the honour

might be, he quite approved of such rapid appraisement of a year or so's labour.

None the less, since none of us are polar, on the historic morning which made him an author indeed he bought all the papers and searched them with a microscopic eye, and an hour or so later he bought the evening papers too; but there was no review. Two or three confessed to having received the book, and that was all.

That evening, however, although he had drawn the papers blank, a letter came from the excellent Romeike asking Rudd if he might not supply cuttings regarding a book which was already being written about on all sides—or words to that seductive effect. And Rudd invested.

His own people wrote quickly—but not too quickly. None of them indulged in that swift manœuvre, so trying to an author, of saying that they were certain to enjoy his delightful volume.

Helen, of course, he did not wish to hear from, except orally; her pride in the book was assured even though she would never be able to pass even an elementary examination on its contents.

Mrs. Sergison was proud too, but found much of it too clever. Yet how wonderful to have made this great volume out of old book-shops! They had always struck her as such dirty places, and it was a miracle that Rudd, after rummaging about in so many, had escaped disease. Old books must be such vehicles for the conveyance of infection. When there

was scarlet fever or anything like that in the house, so many people, she was sure, rather than go to the trouble of having all the books baked, sold them. She had read *The Literary Nimrod* all through and could not sufficiently admire her son's cleverness. Bless him, and might he prosper and be very happy.

Mr. Sergison was approving too. He thought it an entertaining book, a little perhaps too much on the light side. He hoped that Rudd had a good agreement with his publisher. One must be careful about publishers. Was it not Byron who said that Barabbas was a publisher? His own dealings with second-hand booksellers had not been fortunate, the price they offered for a number of valuable Blue Books being scandalous. Still it might be that there were second-hand booksellers and second-hand booksellers. If Rudd anticipated a new edition Mr. Sergison could supply him with a number of corrections. Had he been asked, it would have amused him to read the proofs and prevent all these errors. He thought that the booksellers mentioned in the book owed Rudd a great debt, and hoped that some at any rate would recognize this.

Uncle Ben could not have been more delighted if he had written the book himself. He, too, subscribed to Romeike, and treasured every reference.

Lavis was more critical, but, on the whole, pleased.

"You are a good boy," Voaden wrote, "to send me your book. I have read every word. It is good, and you will do better. Whatever you do, never

take an opinion or valuation second-hand, and above all never try to write like anyone else, especially Lang. Come and see me."

The first review, and taking it all round the best, was in *The Post-Meridian*. But this Rudd dismissed as nepotism. Yet even the most nepotic can, of course, stumble on truth now and again. This early notice having done something towards giving the book publicity, Rudd received three letters from well-to-do friends asking where their presentation copies were. Several second-hand booksellers wrote to complain of being left out, and insisted on being mentioned in the next edition; while the widow of a deceased member of the trade asked for the loan of fifteen pounds for six months, or any gift of money which so successful an author might be moved to send her.

Rudd also had two or three letters from strangers who would be glad to be informed as to which bookseller gave the highest prices for old books. Was there any demand for sermons and theology? Did it matter very much if three or four coloured plates from *The Life of John Mytton* had been lost?

In course of time the rest of the reviews appeared, and they were all more or less friendly. With the assistance of discreet elimination Rudd's publisher could indeed make each of them intensely eulogistic; and as a matter of fact he did so. Thus, the *Chronicle* said that "if it were not for certain blemishes it would be a really good book." In his next advertisement the publisher, who always himself attended to this depart-

ment, attributed to the *Chronicle's* reviewer the four last words only. On discovering this subterfuge Rudd was indignant, and the publisher said that it should not occur again: some clerks were over-zealous.

One of the nicest reviews, in that it had nothing but praise, was in *The Crusader*. Rudd thought it a little fulsome, perhaps, but it warmed him none the less. A day or so later came a note from Gard, whom he had never seen since that night, years ago, asking him to look in again one evening and smoke a pipe. What a memory the fellow had! "I do not say anything about your delightful book," Gard added, "because you may have noticed my honest opinion of it in *The Crusader*."

"Now," said Uncle Ben, "you must write a novel."

"Yes," said Rudd "I feel at last that I really want to. But I must wait till after the wedding."

"What will it be about?" Uncle Ben asked.

"The rich and the poor," said Rudd.

CHAPTER XLII

THE KNEES OF THE GODS

HELEN was comfortably seated in a corner seat, talking to Uncle Ben at the window. Rudd and Lavis paced the platform.

It was the afternoon of the wedding day and the young couple were off to Cornwall for their honeymoon.

Rudd wanted Innisfree, but there are better links near Mullion, it seems.

"We'll see you when we get back?" Rudd said.

"I don't think so," said Lavis. "I believe I'm going away."

"Where?"

"Oh, back to Vancouver."

"That's very sudden," said Rudd in dismay. "Couldn't you wait a little? I've hardly seen you for months."

Lavis smiled but said nothing, and the doors began to be slammed.

Rudd entered his carriage.

"Good-bye," said Uncle Ben.

"Good-bye, good-bye," said Helen and her husband.

"Good-bye," said Lavis.

"Good-bye, good-bye," said Rudd and his wife.

The train moved steadily out . . .

"Well," said Lavis, "so that's done. What do you think? Is it all right?"

"If he doesn't grow out of her?" said Uncle Ben.

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